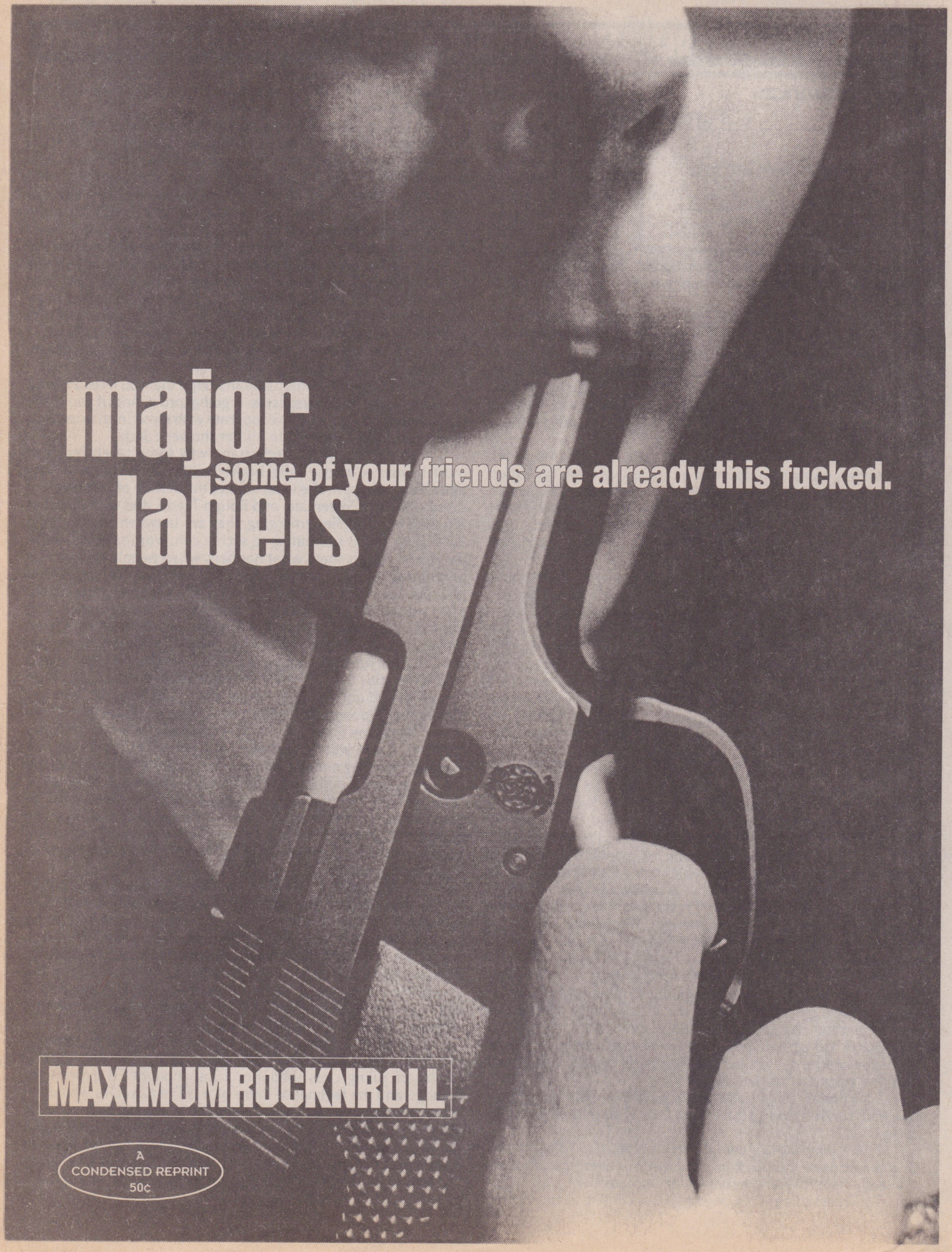
major labels
some of your friends are already this fucked.
MAXIMUMROCKNROLL
A CONDENSED REPRINT
50¢

Tim Yohannan
Tyrant

Maximum Rock and Roll

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Within the last two years, nazi skinheads have beaten up at least 50 underground bands, have destroyed punk clubs and forced their way onto radio programs, have punched out zine editors, label owners and indie distributors. They threaten to stifle and ultimately control this community, and little is being done to resist this threat.

Ooops, wait a minute here. Oh, that was a column from 6 years ago. Well, let's do a little substituting and update this sucker.

Within the last two years, major labels have bought up at least 50 underground bands, have undermined punk clubs and bought their way into radio programs, have bought off zine editors, label owners and indie distributors. They threaten to stifle and ultimately control this community, and little is being done to resist this threat.

Now that's more like it. My point, though, is this: the punk/indie/underground scene **is under attack**, just as it was back then. No difference, except this time the thugs are smarter and richer. Their motivation is just about the same--control, power, dominance. Although the former assault was spurred by extreme right wing political rhetoric, the latter is based on more traditional corporate right wing political objectives.

There can be no middle ground or grey area when you're under attack by forces alien to the fundamental principles of a community or society. That's easy when a band or label is blatant in their changing behavior, but few are out front like that. It is usually much more difficult to discern when people you thought were your friends and were completely committed, start getting chummy with the invaders, whore themselves out, and then rationalize it under a cloak of bullshit. What does it all mean when Green Day is on MTV, or Seaweed signs to Hollywood Records for a million dollars? Or when every corporate "alternative" band has orange hair? Or when Bono and Madonna appear more threatening to the mainstream by saying "fuck" on national TV than so-called corporate punkers like Jawbox and Bad Religion who appear as meek "we're just a band" types? Or K Records being manufactured and distributed by Sub-Pop, and being partially distributed by ADA? Just what the fuck does "alternative" mean then? Or "independent"? Is Matador independent or a part of corporate WEA? Are certain rap labels being touted as "indies" by music biz mags truly independent? Is Epitaph an indie, and if so, just how did they get Rancid on MTV when no other indie band has done that in years. If Epitaph had bought Mike LaVella's *Gearhead* zine after just one issue and then hired him as editor (it was a possibility), how do we know that major labels aren't doing the same with other zines in their quest for credibility and influence? There certainly has been a proliferation of "indie" zines that have suddenly gone glossy and color, with lots of major label ads. It leaves the mind reeling with questions and doubts.

But in this age of double-speak, I feel that there are three important criteria needed here to distinguish the true indie/punk from the corporate "alternative":

1) It doesn't really matter what you say or what you sing, but how you conduct your business and what your motivation for doing it is.

2) It is only by being **completely** separated from governmental and corporate sponsorship, collusion, or connections that one can really claim to be "alternative" or "independent".

3) Unless there is an ongoing class consciousness to one's communication and expression, then it is inevitable that you will be assimilated into mainstream values, no matter how culturally "hip" you attempt to be.

In this issue, we have some totally awesome, no bullshit articles that deal with these questions, approaching it from different directions. Bobby S. Fred, who does *Ben Is Fred* zine and runs the Word Of Mouth label, used to work at a major label and sure as hell knows what he's talking about--mainly what the majors' strategy is in gaining control over and profit from the independent network, concentrating on the phony "indie" labels and distributorships. Steve Albini chips in with an article about the $ and ¢ of a band signing to a major, full of specific details on why such a move is, if nothing else, economic folly. Brian Zero then nails down the corporations in question, an excellent non-dogmatic look at the politics involved. And then Greg Lane of *The Baffler* shows us up close what the rationalizations are of an indie label that gets in bed with a major. And, of course, there are plenty of columns on the subject as well.

I'm very proud of this issue, and hope that you'll read it well, no matter what your perspective is going into it. And, if you come out of it still feeling it's OK to cooperate with these "nazi skinheads in hip garb", then it's time to hit the showers, Jack.

One afterthought: I understand why some labels feel they must submit to major label-backed distributors, because they don't have anywhere else to turn. Since the demise of independent distributors like Systematic and Rough Trade, and with no other Mordam-type families emerging, they are between a rock and a hard place. But is submitting to such a compromise really worth the price? I guess that's what happens when people try to make their living off this scene. Why do Alternative Tentacles and Lookout, who have mucho dinero and the "economic protection" of Mordam, decide to peddle their wares via Caroline? And wouldn't it be nice if some of the "indie" entities that have huge financial assets began some new indie distributorships? Shit, SubPop must have millions now (given their sales of Nirvana and Mudhoney, plus their 12 million dollar (?) settlement with their former distributor, Caroline, as reported in Billboard). Why are they linking up with ADA (Warners) instead of doing it themselves? And how about Dischord? They must have more money than they know what to do with, and since they hardly put out anything new they must be sitting around bored. Why are they still linked up with Southern? Organizations like these have some choices that most other struggling labels don't. Some new, principled and economically sound distributions would help this scene out in so many ways. It's almost criminal that it's not on the drawing board. I would be glad to commit a portion to MRR's profits to such a joint venture.

By the way, this month's cover was conceived before Kurt Cobain took his own life. Despite the bad taste it would now seem to indicate, it was not meant to personally demean him or his passing. No matter what I think of his band's actions, it is sad to see someone being in that much pain. As it turns out, this graphic idea is closer to the mark in more ways than one. And speaking of sensitivity, I thought it was oh so touching that MTV decided to interrupt playing Green Day videos to overwhelm us with Nirvana videos on the day of Kobain's death.

Finally, as Democrats and Repulicans alike join ranks to praise the late ex-President Nixon in a grotesque but illuminating display of ruling class solidarity, I just thought I'd express my feelings--and the feelings of many others I've talked to who don't seem to have access to the mass media--by saying, Richard baby, you mass murderer, you lying scumbag, you sleazy piece of shit, you epitomize everything hypocritical about this society, right down to your now putrid, rotting corpse. Oh, and fuck you too for causing my mail to be delayed. Are we going to have to go through this again soon with Reagan and Bush?!?

EVERYTHING YOU'VE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAJOR LABELS

HOW THE GAME WORKS

by Bobby S. Fred

One of the great joys of writing a little zine is that I get the coolest letters in the mail. Yesterday I got one from Mechanic/Futurist Records. It was a form questionnaire. On it were detailed questions for me to answer along with conveniently typed lines to fill in information. Neat things they wanted to know: my name, the name of my publication (odd seeing as they had already written "Bobby Is Fred" on the envelope), my title 'if applicable', street address, city, state, zip, work phone, home phone, fax, class of my publication (national, regional, fanzine, or newsletter), frequency of publication (monthly, bi-monthly, weekly, bi-weekly, quarterly, or daily), my music preference (death, metal, alternative, hardcore, punk, industrial, or gothic), my closest "large metropolitan market", clubs I often visit, and finally this: "Do you watch MTV? If yes, what programs?" Wow! These guys must really care about me if they want to know this much about me! Each time I get one of these questionnaires I feel so honored, so special.

Across the top of the letter was written, "We have recently come across information regarding your publication and would like to know more about you." Where'd they get this line? The FBI? "Please fill out the simple questionnaire below and mail it back to our offices with a sample of (your) publication. Once your information is recorded in our database, you will begin to enjoy regular servicing." ...Servicing? What... for my car? Outstanding! I can't wait to enjoy "servicing"! I just hope I don't have to drive very far to get it. (If there's one thing I've learned it's that if something seems to good to be true, it probably is. I'll bet I have to drive clear across town to get to their service station. And after that I bet I have to buy something like an air freshener before they touch my car.) With that in mind, most of these letters just end up getting tossed.

One thing I really do wish though is that the companies who send me these things would start using friggin' stamps instead of postage meters. At least I could cut the stamp off and soak it. - But my wish usually never comes true.

Hmm... Mechanic/Futurist Records. I've never heard of them. A quick call to a buddy of mine who writes for a fancy music publication revealed that Mechanic is a subsidiary of Giant and is distributed through Warner Brothers. They currently have two bands on their label, Tad and Seed. I've never heard of Seed, but Tad?! As in Tad from Sub Pop? Looking back at the questionnaire I don't see anything mentioned about Warner Brothers. My friend tells me that Futurist is a scam indie distributed through Relativity. In fact, Futurist recently released a Tad 7" in an effort to bolster the coolness of the band before their record came out on the more commercial Mechanic label. The funny thing is that if I hadn't made an effort to track this info down, I probably would have thought both Mechanic and Futurist were just some misguided indies that had an NYU computer major for a publicist.

[By the way, I wonder what happens after I fill out a questionnaire like this. Who eventually gets all of my vital information? Does it stop at Mechanic in New York or is it eventually passed on to Giant and Warner Brothers as well? And if Warner Brothers gets it, is it then passed on to someone else after that? (Just wondering.) Somehow I'll never forget getting a call from the U.S. Army after I filled out a contest entry form at a Baskin Robbins with a bogus name. They wanted to know why a "Joe Strummer" at my address had never registered for the draft.]

It seems like one of the big trends these days at Major Label Central is to make everything look as "indie" as possible. (This comes on the heels of an earlier trend that tried to make everything look as "Seattle" as possible.) A while ago the big labels decided that the indie world holds great value as a breeding ground for the cash cows (make that sacrificial lambs) of the "alternative" future. They've gotten tired, however, of having to spend enormous amounts of cash in bidding wars to scoop the big fish out of the indie pond. Hence the creation of the scam indie.

What does "scam indie" exactly mean? The best way to define it, I think, is simply an independently distributed label that works in direct collusion with or is financed by a major label. A major label I would define as any record label owned and/or distributed by any of the big six distributors. Reprise, for example is a major label. Geffen (as we all know) is a major. Arista is a major. Island is a major. American (formerly Def American) is a major. These are just random examples. (Refer to the charts for full details.) A scam indie then works closely with one of these majors, but in fact is marketed and distributed independently of the big six distributors.

Here is a primer on some of the scam indies

Wasteland
- distributed through Caroline
- owned by Radioactive (which itself is distributed through UNI via MCA).
- bands: Pray TV from Australia, Angelfish from Scotland, and Dig from California.

Wasteland's main release last year was a CD by the "Desperately Seeking Alternative" band Dig. The marketing plan for Dig is a good case to review. Wasteland released Dig through Caroline Distribution, while its parent, Radioactive, followed up with an aggressive regional advertising campaign. Wasteland asked Caroline to sell 20,000 units in an initial 3 month period, after which Radioactive was to takeover and push Dig through the major distributor

MECHANIC/FUTURIST RECORDS

Dear Journalist/Editor:

We have recently come across information regarding your writing/publication and would like to know more about you. Please fill out the simple questionnaire below and mail it back to our offices with a sample of the publication at: 6 Greene St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY, 10013. You may also fax us at: (212) 941-9409. Once your information is recorded in our database, you will begin to enjoy regular servicing. We thank you for your time and interest.

Publicity Director: Paula J. Hogan Publicity Assistant: Pete Tsakiris

NAME:

PUBLICATION:

TITLE (if applicable):

STREET ADDRESS:

CITY: STATE: ZIPCODE:

WORK PHONE: HOME PHONE: FAX:

PUBLICATION CLASS (circle one): NATIONAL REGIONAL SCHOOL FANZINE NEWSLETTER

PUBLICATION TYPE (circle one): MONTHLY BI-MONTHLY WEEKLY BI-WEEKLY QUARTERLY DAILY

MUSIC PREFERENCE: DEATH METAL ALTERNATIVE HARDCORE PUNK INDUSTRIAL GOTHIC

FREELANCE JOURNALISTS: What publications are you actively working for?

Your closest large metropolitan market?

Clubs you often visit?

Do you watch MTV? If yes, what programs?

UNI. All of Dig's ads appeared with the Wasteland logo, and Caroline was eventually able to unload about 10,000 copies before Radioactive decided it was time to bump the project up the commercial ladder. Late this winter the Dig video made it onto MTV and the band put in live performances on several talk shows.

Frankly I'm really not sure what all of this accomplished. Did selling 10,000 CDs through Caroline really give Dig a hip, street-level vibe? Did the fact that all those ads showed the Wasteland logo instead of the Radioactive one really make any difference? Who the fuck knows. More and more major labels, though, think this is the way to go.

[Late last year Caroline released a CD by the band St. Johnny's. There was an unconfirmed rumor that Geffen Records had pushed the band through Caroline for the first few thousand units before the label decided to release their latest CD through it's own distributor, UNI. Regardless of whether this is indeed accurate, there will be many, many similar examples to come in the future.]

Seed
- scam indie distributed through Alternative Distribution Alliance (ADA) [the label has no relation to the *band*]
- owned by Atlantic
- bands are: Television Personalities, Nightblooms, Leatherface, Tumbleweed, Madder Rose, Monsterland, Nightblooms, Pastels, Earthmen, Fuzzy, Ivy, and Inch

In many ways this is a perfectly named label. By starting seedling bands out in their greenhouse, Atlantic is hoping that with careful gardening some of the groups will grow strong enough to be planted in the front yard. Craig Kallman, a VP at Atlantic, originally started a dance & rap label called Big Beat. He later started Seed as an "alternative" label. Seed tries very hard to appear as indie as possible. Seed is about to release a CD by a San Diego band called Inch. Below is a chart that uses this example as another case to study

ANATOMY OF A SCAM

- Inch: a four member band from San Diego with two previous 7" releases, including a split 7" with Contra Guerra.
- A&R scout from Los Angeles office of Atlantic Records sees Inch while down in San Diego looking for bands. Returns to L.A. & recommends pursuing the band.
- Atlantic A&R staff greenlight the project and move it on to Atlantic scam indie Seed Records.
- Seed releases a 7" to set the band up for CD release in April
- Inch CD entitled "Stresser" released by Seed on April 5th.
- Advance promo copies mailed to college radio and fanzines in Seed envelopes (with postage from Atlantic mailroom?)
- All marketing and promotion is handled by Seed. Distribution is handled by ADA. CDs shipped out to indie mom & pop record stores.
- If all goes well, Inch will develop a following thru radio airplay, alternative press, and national touring. Seed will pull every string possible to give Inch some form of street credibility.
- Craig Kallman, VP at Atlantic, eventually decides whether or not to recommend elevating the band to Seed's parent, Atlantic Records.

Thirsty Ear
- distributed by Relativity
- independently owned but works in collusion with Sony
- Sony has the "first option" to sign Thirsty Ear bands.
- current bands are: Small Ball Paul and Queen Sarah Saturday (with several more in the works)

Vernon Yard
- distributed partially by Caroline and partially by CEMA
- owned by Virgin
- been in existence about 1 1/2 years.
- bands are: Verve, Acetone, Low, and The Auteurs

World Domination
- currently distributed partially by Relativity and partially by CEMA
- originally tied to Capitol (but now owned by "Japanese investors" according to a spokesperson)
- label has been in existence for 2 years
- label manager is actively seeking to disassociate the label from Capitol. All ties to CEMA are being severed. Future distribution to be handled exclusively through Relativity.
- bands are: Psyclone Rangers, Stanford Prison Experiment, Sky Cries Mary, Low Pop Suicide, Elastic Purejoy, and 17-24

Beggar's Banquet
- British label manufactured here in the U.S. by Atlantic
- mainly distributed through ADA
- larger Beggar's Banquet bands like Buffalo Tom and The Charlatans go through Atlantic to WEA.
- other bands: Polyphemus, Radial Spangle, Rollerskate Skinny, Sundial, Hair and Skin Trading Co.

Caroline
- both a label and a distributor
- owned by Virgin
- bands on label evidently are NOT tied to Virgin (for example Walt Mink recently signed to a Sony label.) - It is widely rumored, however, that the Smashing Pumpkins were originally a Virgin signing before their records first appeared on Caroline.
- other bands: Idaho, Buzzcocks, Adrian Beleu, Peach (from Seattle), Seefeel (on Astralwerks), Bark Psychosis, Action Swingers, Drop Nineteens, Fudge, Bracket

More scam indies of note

Mechanic and **Futurist** I've already mentioned. **Ecstatic Peace** (Thurston Moore's label) is handled by Geffen.

External is the scam indie run by London Records. **Stardog** is a joke handled by Mercury (see every Ugly Kid Joe CD). **Revolution**, a label run by Ron LaFitte, the manager for Megadeath, gets a lot of help from Capitol Records on distribution & promotion. - Upcoming releases this year include LPs by Big Chief and Truly. (Yes, both coming off of Sub Pop.) **Medicine**, home of the horror known as Green Apple Quickstep, is part of Giant which is distributed by Warner Brothers. **Fiction Records** is somehow related to PolyGram, but fuck if I know how. Bands include Eat, Black Happy, Bleed, and Peace Love & Pitbulls. There are many more examples out there but neither I nor MRR have even half the resources necessary to track them all down.

To play devil's advocate for a moment, it's important to note how the bands are treated in this whole process. In *some* ways this scam indie thing is a benefit to them. They receive a lot of attention from their downsized label, and they're handled by people who generally know a hell of a lot more about their world than major label executives. Political issues aside, this is better than being churned out with a shitload of the other random bands in a major label's loaded release schedule. Bands drop like flies in this process. The advantage to The Meices, for example, by coming out on External instead of London is that PolyGram's I.L.S. (Independent Label Sales) will promote their record for a year, whereas PGD, PolyGram's main distributor, would probably promote it for about four weeks. In another example, Thirsty Ear is only working with two bands at the moment. That currently allows for a lot of individual attention for those bands. However, if Thirsty Ear goes on a signing spree (and they probably will) the individual attention will drop off quickly.

The key to running a scam indie is making it appear as unattached to a major corporation as possible. For some bizarre reason a few of the labels mentioned above (like Medicine) actually print their parent company's name in small letters in the corners of their ads. If you're trying to appear indie, why blow it so blatantly?! (I can just see a Medicine guy running down the hall to the advertising division of Giant with this article in his hand.) By disassociating the scam indie from it's true parent, the marketing folks hope to powder the baby label with some kind of pixie dust "credibility." Hell, sometimes they can even fool fanzine editors into letting them advertise for half price!

Once a label is disassociated from its true parent, an alternative form of distribution is naturally required. This is where everything gets a bit confusing. Since none of us have the training and skill of Dr. Geffen or Dr. Warner Brothers, we teeny little zine writers have to conduct our research without the benefit of DNA testing. Finding the true biological parents of ALL the pseudo indies in the musical nursery is practically impossible. My preferred method of genetic detection is looking at independent distributors.

There are three so called "indie" distributors that are owned by majors. They are: Caroline (owned by Virgin), Relativity (owned by Sony), and Alternative Distribution Alliance or ADA (owned by a group led by Warner Bros.) There is sort of a fourth scam "indie" distributor out there called I.L.S. (Independent Label Sales) which is part of PolyGram, but to my knowledge they only sell to one stops and other distributors. They don't maintain any direct accounts with stores.

Caroline, Relativity, and ADA all maintain and cultivate accounts with the smaller record stores and mini chains across the country. Each of these distributors handle stuff for *both* majors and indie labels. ADA for example distributes for Sub Pop, Restless, and Beggar's Banquet which are all often thought of as indie labels. They also handle the initial shipments of releases for "alternative" bands on Warner, Elektra, and Atlantic. This, then, is the grey area where majors and indies overlap.

To play devil's advocate again (and at least give the semblance of writing something that is even mildly well rounded) it's not entirely fair to attack real indie labels for using midlevel distributors. (See the major-owned indie distributor chart for examples.) The bottom line out there is survival. As anyone who heads up a big indie now will tell you, the memories of working out of a tiny office (or bedroom), barely being able to pay rent, and struggling to make it through the year leaves an indelible impression upon their minds. Indies, even some of the big ones, are always just one or two disasters away from complete failure. (If you don't believe this just talk to Daniel House at C/Z Records. This last winter *was* a disaster for him, and now C/Z is on the edge of bankruptcy.) Living close to the edge like that makes indie managers practically phobic about bringing in enough money, even if they *are* having a bumper year. Anyone who starts an indie label is going up tremendous odds. The ever watchful IRS reckons that about 95% of all start up businesses in this country fail within a few years. Yes, folks, that's 95%. If you have the guts to lay your dreams on the line and wager against those odds, you should do anything you can to fight to stay alive. If somehow you make it, just try to remember that you have an obligation to stay true to your scene. Using midlevel distributors is like taking medicine. Small doses can be good for you. Large doses can be lethal.

Back to I.L.S. for a moment: They distribute the smaller imprint PolyGram labels like Island Red, Mango, 4th & Broadway, Gee Street, FFRR, External, etc. I.L.S. is about to handle a record coming out on A&M called Deep Six, which is early Soundgarden-Mudhoney stuff that originally appeared on C/Z. External, as I noted earlier, is the scam indie run by London. I.L.S. is already hard at work pushing their just released Meices record.

I.L.S. sells to Universal or Big State Distribution who then in turn sell to the one stops who then in turn sell to the stores. It's hard to think of I.L.S. as a distributor because they're separated from the moms & pops by so many layers. It might be easier to think of them as the "scam indie promotion" wing of PolyGram because they interact with moms & pops more on a promotional basis. An I.L.S. spokesperson said that they also sell a little to Dutch East, Cargo, and Twin Cities, although I couldn't get separate confirmation of this. (The bottom line these days is that everyone sells to everyone else. Some like to hide the connections, others just don't mind.)

Smaller stores that don't sell music in high volume (i.e. don't shovel tons of CD's out the door every day) usually go to a one stop distributor to do most of their buying. One stops are distributors that aren't tied to specific labels. They provide major label products to smaller stores that aren't big enough to have an account with a major distributor. A buyer at a mom & pop store can get a wide variety of music at a one stop, including *both* indie and major label releases. Because one stops are an additional layer between labels and stores, the store buyer has to pay slightly higher prices when using them. It's also important to note that majors only allow up to 10% of the product shipped through a one stop to be returned while 100% of indie stuff can be sent back for credit.

Why in the heck would majors want to go to all this trouble just to access indie buyers? Heck, if indie buyers only make up a small portion of the music buying audience, why would a major waste its time trying to appeal to them?

There are several answers to this question.

In today's "alternative" music environment access to

EVERYTHING YOU'VE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAJOR LABELS

Labels distributed by **Caroline**

Alias
Antler Subway
Astralwerks
Big Deal
Blackout
Caroline
Cleopatra
Earthworks
Editions EG
Engine
Virgin Front Line (Reggae)
Gyroscope
Herald
Hey Day Records
Matador
No. 6
Off Beat
Plan 9
Play It Again Sam
Railroad Records
Realworld
Silent
spinART
Taang!
Thrill Jockey
Venture
Vernon Yard
Wasteland

Labels distributed by **ADA Alternative Distribution Alliance**

4AD
Atlantic
Beggars Banquet
Dali
Elektra
Hollywood
Interscope
K
Luaka Bop
Matador
Mechanic/Futurist
Medicine
Mute
Reprise
Restless
Seed
Sire
Slash
Sub Pop
Twin Tone
Warner Bros.
Will

Labels distributed by **Relativity**

Albertine
Bib/Unsigned
Capricorn
Century Media
Cherrydisc
Circumstantial
Collectors Series
Continuum
CZ
Daemon
Earache
Energy
Epitaph
Guitar Recordings
Mammoth
Mechanic/Futurist
Metal Blade
Moon
Nettwork
November
Nuc. Blast/Relapse
Pavement
Red Light/Grindcore
Relativity
Relix
Rex
Roadrunner
Rotten
Shrapnel
Southern Studios
Stardog
Streetbeat
Thirsty Ear
Touch and Go
Triple X
Tristar
Turbo
World Domination

the indie buying underworld is seen as a highly necessary marketing tool. If a post-punk band with no previous releases gets signed to Polymer Records and Polymer wants to see that band go on to sell lots and lots of records, the first thing they've got to do is make the band look as cool as possible. The best way to do that is to try to scam the indie buying world into adopting their cause. As Karin Gembus at the highly respected indie distributor Mordam points out, "All of these major affiliated 'indies' that aren't really even indies are trying to get street credibility by channeling these bands in a certain way that people will think 'Oh wow, the new, next indie rocker. How cool!'"

Even if a scam indie can build just a little bit of a groundswell, they can use that as leverage to go after a wider commercial audience. Music that charts well at college radio, for example, has a better chance of crossing over to "commercial alternative" radio than music that doesn't. A major label release that bypasses college radio and goes straight to commercial alternative has no track record and hence no momentum to get it into heavier rotation.

I just used the example of college radio as a testing ground. Really there are *four* testing grounds: college radio, indie record stores, indie oriented magazines & fanzines, and venues like Jabberjaw, CBGB's, Lounge Ax, Covered Dish, and La Luna. A good scam indie will focus on promoting its bands via all four of these avenues. Think about that. A major supported label channeling its resources to promote bands in the four areas that are by tradition anti-major and anti-commercial. (You should be feeling a little queasy by now.) It's clear, then, why majors need to be covert about it.

A second reason that majors want to try to run their own indie labels is that it allows them to acquire "talent" (i.e. bands) at cheaper prices. Major label accountants point out that the costs of signing unknown bands and marketing them through scam indies are less expensive than having to *buy* talent from, for example, Sub Pop or Taang. Plus with the scam indie they can spread costs out over *several* baby bands at once and hope that two or three eventually hit. If it works it beats the shit out of making a half million dollar bet on one horse.

Sometimes majors prefer to foster distribution relationships with larger indies, like Mammoth, Matador, and Sub Pop. This provides a major with access to pre-formed "packages" of indie talent. Any form of access to the indie talent pool is considered highly valuable. [Note: Surprisingly it's hard for me to strongly criticize Matador in this particular case. Rarely has an indie label taken the kinds of chances on innovative bands that Matador has over the last few years and survived. Matador is the *one* label I would ever reprieve from complete vilification in this area, like what I think really makes a difference anyway!]

Yet another reason for doing the scam indie thing is that if a band *does* go on to do bigger and better things on the parent label, the company already has the band's entire back catalogue. Since catalogue is king, it pays to be the kingmaker.

It's worth noting here that when a major picks a band up from a true indie label, they often try to grab the band's catalogue as well. Sometimes they buy it, and sometimes they steal it. I wonder if Lookout! has been having any problems with Warner Bros. about Green Day? I'd bet my last dollar that Warner Bros. has taken a very close look at Larry's rights to Kerplunk and 39 Smooth. (Think of Warner Bros. as the size of planet earth and Lookout! the size of a tennis ball.)

One horror story that comes to mind here is

Subterranean's run in with Def American over Flipper. When Def American signed Flipper a couple of years ago, Subterranean was completely shut out. Flipper in essence "sold" their catalogue to Def American without ever asking their former label if it was okay. Since Steve, who owns Subterranean, had spent a lot of money, time, and energy helping them build that catalogue, he naturally protested. When he tried to go to Rick Rubin, Def American's president, with his claim, he was met with a swift legal kick in the head from a Warner Brothers lawyer. All in all, Steve's former relationship with Flipper probably cost him about $10,000 in unrecouped recording costs and legal fees. Rubin could easily have reimbursed Steve for his losses, but chose instead to shut him out. "Thanks for helping build the band. Now go fuck yourself." Jeez, that's major label gratitude for you.

Yet another horror story is the one about Geffen trying to steal Urge Overkill's releases away from Touch and Go. (If anyone ever has any doubts about the highly corrupt nature of major labels, look into this story. You'll find the Geffen folks giving a whole new meaning to the word 'evil.')

Finally, with a scam indie a major can spend small amounts of money on the initial record simply to see if the indie buying underworld even likes the band. Radioactive I don't think even bothered to try this with Dig. The Radioactive execs blew Dig through their Wasteland scam and headed the band right on to major distribution without ever sticking their finger in the wind. The fact is Dig sucks. Dig sucks really badly. I guess Radioactive thinks if they spend enough money on the band they can make it go. In contrast I doubt Sony would take a Thirsty Ear band to the next level unless they'd really proven themselves in the indie environment. I'm also guessing the same about Seed. We'll see. Look for what happens with Inch from San Diego.

The bottom line, of course, is that majors want to have farm teams in every music format. The Nirvana explosion woke majors up to the "new" format and commercial viability of post-punk. Now the majors are scrambling to get their farm teams in place. (I was hoping to write this whole article without ever using the "N" word, but shit, I just couldn't help it. Okay... Nirvana ...NIRVANA! Okay? There it is! I said it!)

Majors have decided to push every band they can through the relatively small door that Nirvana opened. (If you don't think it's small, look at the back page of a Rolling Stone to see some sales figures. The March 24th issue - ironically the "College Issue" - shows one punk oriented band in the top 40 sellers. Yes, it's Nirvana.) To delve deeper into this whole revolting "alternative" thing, there are 11 releases on that chart that are placed in this bizarre category. They are: Alice In Chains, Counting Crows, Pearl Jam, Smashing Pumpkins, 10,000 Maniacs, Stone Temple Pilots, The Cranberries, Gin Blossoms, Nirvana, the Sleepless In Seattle soundtrack, and The Breeders. Two years ago, when the term "alternative" was first minted, maybe 5 of those releases would have been called by that name. Clearly any form of criteria for membership in this amorphous category is fading away.

Some of you may be confused by what I have just written, especially after you read recent articles about how Soundgarden entered the charts at #1 with their latest release and how this proves to the music industry that "alternative" is a major force as a music format, etc. etc. Yes, I agree that this thing called "alternative" is hot and that bands lumped in there are indeed selling very well. What I do NOT agree with is that this is an "explosion of punk" thing. It's clearly not. Majors and the rest of the mass media want you to *believe* it's an explosion of punk thing. In fact major magazine writers have gotten to the point where they now mention the punk explosion thing almost parenthetically because it's supposed to be so obvious. (Ex: Rolling Stone, April 7, 1994, p. 16, 3rd column, the writer starts a sentence with, "In fact, now that punk and rap rule the charts...") What?! What the fuck are you talking about?! Look at your own fucking charts! (Or as the Jerky Boys say in their best Indian accent, "Look at your fucking food! Maybe you poison everybody!")

Every *true* punk or post-punk band that is signed to a major is simply a means of major label identification with the movement Nirvana brought to the surface. Even if the Melvins, for example, only sell a few thousand records for Atlantic, the "alternative" by association factor provides highly desired marketing points for the label. There is *no way* that Atlantic expects Bad Religion to sell millions of records. I'm sorry, but they just don't. They do, however, expect Bad Religion to help bolster the image of their label in the "alternative" marketplace, and thereby foster "coolness by association" for every other band on the label. Think about the dolt at one of those jackass college radio stations somewhere that only plays major label music. "Hey, look, the Stone Temple Pilots and Bad Religion CDs just came in!" Browsing through the college playlists in the February 21st issue of the College Music Journal, I came across a perfect example: WMLN in Milton, Massachussetts. The records that charted in their top 35 that week were by these artists:
Counting Crows, Possum Dixon, James, Therapy?, Redd Kross, Crash Test Dummies, Tori Amos, Connells, KMFDM, Buffalo Tom, Afghan Whigs, US 3, Pearl Jam, Alternative NRG, In The Name Of The Father soundtrack, Wade, Smashing Pumpkins, Candy Planet, Shonen Knife, Melvins, Candlebox, Pillbox, Ultras, Jawbox, Dead Milkmen, Enigma, Fleshtones, Lemonheads, Die Monster Die, That Dog, Green Day, Dig, Breeders, Nirvana, and Plastikman.

Sorry to bore you with the minutia here, but I could not have made up a better example than this playlist. Five maybe six bands from the post-punk indie world mixed in with this other shit. Who'll end up selling more do you think, Jawbox or the Counting Crows? The Melvins or the Lemonheads? In a sense it can all be distilled to a Nirvana vs. Pearl Jam battle. (And folks it's Pearl Jam by about 50 lengths.) If you *don't* think Pearl Jam is trying to get a ride off punk rock, I would refer you to that issue of Entertainment Weekly about a year back when Pearl Jam graced the cover. If you look at Eddie Vedder, you'll see that he wrote "Fugazi" in black marker on his forearm. (...Hey! Yeah! Who knows, maybe Pearl Jam will start covering punk tunes like Guns 'N Roses!)

At KROQ in Los Angeles playing Nirvana is probably still considered "taking a risk." If we could plant hidden microphones in KROQ's marketing meetings we'd probably hear something like this: "Okay, next week we'll play Jawbox about 5 times to bolster our credibility ...wow, aren't we risk takers! Then we'll play Counting Crows, James, Crash Test Dummies, Tori Amos, Buffalo Tom, Pearl Jam, Candlebox, and the Lemonheads about a 100 times each. Yep, that should do the trick!" The fact that Jawbox might be heard on KROQ at all is positively shocking. Who the fuck would ever have thought of hearing a Dischord band on KROQ! It was only a little while ago that the KROQ music director had never even heard of Fugazi (as was reported in bobby is fred #1). By the way, guess which label put out the new Jawbox CD? Yes - Atlantic. ...Is Atlantic slowly replacing Geffen as the main source of evil in the world?

In the end, even if a major loses money on a scam indie, to them that's okay. Most majors probably expect to lose money on these ventures. It's simply seen as a neces-

sary cost of marketing bands in today's "alternative" environment. More than anything this is the precise reason that scam indies should be reviled by anyone who believes in what used to be called independent music. Majors have very deep pockets. Their ability to lose money on scam indies is a cut throat strategy. By soaking up the talent pool at the lowest levels and by muscling in on independent distribution, majors are trying to push the little guys out of the game. (Isn't Wal-Mart facing basically this same criticism as they run small town department stores into the ground?)

Fortunately there's *no way* they *can* push the little guys out of the game. The deeper major labels invade the indie world, the deeper the indie world will go. Even if major entertainment conglomerates find a way to make indie labels *illegal*, future punkers will find a way to continue to subvert the system.

Sadly, if Green Day hits it big on Warner Bros. (and they probably will) it'll provide yet another boost to this entire process. In September of '93 I remember seeing Green Day open for Bad Religion at The Palladium in Hollywood. I couldn't believe how many people turned up. Wow. Green Day playing in front of thousands of people. I went up in the balcony and ran into a guy named Rob who said he produced the Green Day record for Warner Brothers. I think he mentioned something about an A&R gig there too. I said wow, the Green Day record will probably do pretty well. He said yeah, he hoped so. (I thought I saw the color of Nirvana flash through his eyes.) Later he introduced me to his dad, Bob, who he said manages Paula Abdul and who used to manage Prince. As he shook my hand, the image of Joe Pesci from Goodfellas flashed through my mind. "*Dance* that drink back to me, Spider!" I watched in fascination as he looked down at Green Day and nodded his head with approval. Wow, maybe someday Green Day will get to open for Paula. ...After a while Rob introduced me to his sister. "If you know of any good unsigned bands around, my sister could really use one. She works over at Madonna's label, Maverick." I cheerfully suggested Fugazi, but she had never heard of them. I excused myself and sulked back downstairs. Shit. Why didn't I say Zappa?

Sometimes I think that money and power have so corrupted everything that big companies now want to own all forms of art and music that can be used for commerce. Even if they can't own the music, they will always want to control access to it (i.e. the delivery system). When Nirvana rocketed into the stratosphere two years ago it was the clarion call for every major label in sight to rush into the scene to try to grab everything that breathed. The wild thing about this whole process is that majors are going way overboard in their exuberance. Since none of them have the proverbial crystal ball (and in fact it just doesn't exist), each band they sign is a veritable crap shoot. Think about this. Every single big label out there has grabbed a handful of post-punk oriented bands. Only 1 out of 20 of these bands is ever going to sell enough records to make a major happy. Couple that with the fact that horrible "commercial alternative" bands like Dig are being pushed in the faces of people currently buying everything from The Breeders and Frank Black to Nine Inch Nails and Helmet. Shelby Foote often used to say, "There are too many pigs for the teats." In this case there are way too many teats for the pigs. Something will have to give.

You as consumers have three choices (actually four, but the fourth will get you a life sentence.)

•One: Buy into this whole process.

•Two: Passively resist. Take the time to learn what forms the serpentine mass media are taking and avoid them as best you can.

•Three: Actively resist. Write a fanzine. Start a label. Make your own films.

•Four: Violently resist. Find David Geffen's home address and pay him a Halloween visit in the style of Eric & Lyle Menendez. The downside is that you'll spend the rest of your life in jail and possibly be executed by the state. The upside is that you'll graduate to matyrdom (...If you do go this route it means, however, that you'll have played into the hands of the mass media because they'll be able to sell tons of advertising on your story. For godsakes don't do it!)

Finally I'd like to make a few more points about the mass media. (In fact I plan to really go off the deep end here.) The other night I happened to see a show called Dateline on NBC. One of the features of that night's program was an in-depth personal interview with Jeffrey Dahmer. Over the course of the interview I was shocked to see a casual discussion of torture, cannibalism, and dismemberment. Jeffrey Dahmer sat calmly in a chair while the NBC reporter sat across from him and coaxed him through the gory details of his past. Everything was very casual and quite polite. Dahmer quietly discussed how he had taken young teenage boys into his apartment, drugged them, and then drilled holes in their heads so he could pour acid into their brains. He talked about how he had carried a young boy's head and genitals around in a box as a prized personal possession. I was completely horrified by what I saw and heard during that broadcast. My God. NBC had touted this interview with Dahmer as a great "exclusive" for their network.

Two points immediately come to mind about this: First, I find it strange that a lot of people are so quick to criticize lyrics in music and so slow to grasp the horrors in movies and television. (I refer you to the 1985 Congressional hearings on musical lyrics featuring fine testimony from members of the Parents' Music Resource Center.) The "Jeffrey Dahmer Show" aired at about 8pm, just in time for little Johnny to clean his dishes, flip on the tube, and hear a story about a man who sodomized the dead body of a fourteen year old before he cut it up and cooked it. Great. Just great. Secondly, and sticking to the point of this article, if the future of news and entertainment lies in the hands of the coming superconglomerates and if the current trend in mass media is sensationalism, what does this say about the state of the coming information age? What does this say about the power of ratings, the power of gaining an audience, and the power of influencing our minds? Isn't it ironic that just a little while ago it was thought that underground record labels were semi-subversive? What about the sensationally driven entertainment conglomerates? I ask you what is more subversive, the glorification of psychotic and criminal violence by the mass media, or listening to a punk rock band sing about the angst of everday life? Even GG Allin was incredibly tame compared to Jeffrey Dahmer. Sometimes I just see this whole values thing as a top down problem and not a bottom up problem.

The real point here is that it is the major entertainment companies as a whole are far more responsible for creating our Pottervilles than any of us as individuals are. With all of their power and all of their access why don't they use more of their vast resources for the force of good? It seems that the type of person who gets ahead at a major record label is the one who is perfectly ready to do anything it takes, good or bad. Is "good" not good for business? Why do major record labels churn out so many truly awful people? These are folks who have no problem telling the truth and being honest ...if it's to their advantage. They also have no problem lying and being deceitful ...if it's to their advantage. And we as *individuals* in society

are constantly berated by the mass media for the decay of family values. Let me see if I've got this straight. *We* , the sheep-like consumers, *we*, the end-users of all that mass media, *we* are responsible for the decay in family values?

On an important animal rights note, too many of us now refer to record label A&R people as "weasels." That's not really fair to weasels. Let's be nice to weasels and not give them such a bad rap by associating them with the lowest form of life on the planet.

These days A&R people seem more like chameleons. They disguise themselves in all sorts of ways in order to run intelligence gathering missions into the punker world. A&R people know that punker kids will naturally resist their probing questions at clubs and various other congregation points. Beware, though! A&R people come in all different forms. They are disguising themselves in a multitude of ways in order to try to gain your trust.

When major labels aren't sending covert agents out into the punker world, they're "buying" agents *from* and the punker world. The owner of a prominent underground club in L.A. is now an A&R rep for Priority Records. Thirsty Ear snatched up a knowledgeable guy from indie bastion KXLU in L.A. and shipped him out to their HQ in New York. There's a girl at Columbia Records in NY who spent years volunteering at Gilman before she was eventually co-opted. She's now known to be calling fanzine editors across the country offering to finance their publications in return for unspecified favors. Finally, I come to the curious case of the DJ's at KCRW here in L.A. It seems that several of them are agents for major labels. Heck, the friggin' music director, Chris Douridas, is on the payroll at Geffen as an A&R rep! Is that ethical? Wait, is that even *legal*? There's a girl there named Lara Hill who sent me a form letter recently. She does a radio show at KCRW called "Subterranean Soundwaves." What the letter doesn't say is that her show only airs once a month and that her real job is the A&R manager for WEA distributed EastWest Records. Great. Just great.

To sum up the long tirade that I have just spilled forth on these pages, I turn again to the rapidly growing media conglomerates. In advance of the upcoming conversion to the "information super-highway" system, entertainment companies are being snatched up like flies by cable giants and baby bells. There's a massive rush to grab the remaining "software" companies left behind after Japan's two giants, Sony and Matsushita raided Hollywood. The Japanese want software for the entertainment systems they manufacture. But the cable giants and the baby bells have a better idea. Fuck CD players. They'll *transmit* everything you need directly to you via fiber optic cable. ...Do you think they'll let small indie labels sell and transmit music through this system? At what price?

And you think entertainment companies are big now. Just wait!

•Report from the future [again going off the deep end]: Owning cable boxes will be mandatory. Owning a record player will be punishable by 10 years in the new *super*jail system. Owning a CD player at first will only be punishable by a small fine. (We don't want to piss off the Japanese.) But soon we'll throw you in one of the *super*jails for that too.

•Report from way off into the future: We'll feed a strand of the information super-highway directly into the superjails. Each prisoner will be forced to wear a virtual reality visor, and we'll reprogram them, starting with their early childhood experiences. ..Yes! Steve Austin, man in prison. We can retard him ...I mean rebuild him! We have the technology to build the world's first retarded man. ...Oh forget it.

In the final analysis there are just two words that best describe major entertainment companies: corrupt and evil. Any organization that puts making money ahead of human value is inherently evil. By attempting to corrupt the street level expressions of our music, the entertainment conglomerates are corrupting our very culture and hence our very lives. True independent record labels, independent publications, and all other independent forms of expression are the final speed bumps on the coming superconglomerates' drive toward total media domination.

The Faustian world of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* is now arriving on track 5. ... (whistle)

I say, "All abort!"

If you want to write to Bobby S. Fred directly, his address is PO Box 25656, Los Angeles, CA 90025, or via Internet at: cyberfred@aol.com

subterranean

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MARCH 10, 1994

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MY NAME IS LARA HILL AND I HOST A RADIO SHOW ON KCRW CALLED "SUBTERRANEAN SOUNDWAVES WHERE I FEATURE UNSIGNED BANDS AND BANDS ON INDEPENDENT LABELS.

I AM ALWAYS LOOKING FOR NEW BANDS TO PLAY ON MY SHOW.

I HEARD ABOUT YOUR GREAT FANZINE [redacted] ND WOULD LOVE TO BE PUT ON YOUR MAILING LIST. IF THERE IS A FEE, PLEASE LET ME KNOW.

MY ADDRESS IS:
LARA HILL
9229 SUNSET BLVD. SUITE #800
LOS ANGELES, CA 90069

THANK YOU VERY MUCH,

LARA HILL

EVERYTHING YOU'VE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAJOR LABELS

THE PROBLEM WITH MUSIC

by Steve Albini

Whenever I talk to a band who are about to sign with a major label, I always end up thinking of them in a particular context. I imagine a trench, about four feet wide and five feet deep, maybe sixty yards long, filled with runny, decaying shit. I imagine these people, some of them good friends, some of them barely acquaintances, at one end of this trench. I also imagine a faceless industry lackey at the other end, holding a fountain pen and a contract waiting to be signed.

Nobody can see what's printed on the contract. It's too far away, and besides, the shit stench is making everybody's eyes water. The lackey shouts to everybody that the first one to swim the trench gets to sign the contract. Everybody dives in the trench and they struggle furiously to get to the other end. Two people arrive simultaneously and begin wrestling furiously, clawing each other and dunking each other under the shit. Eventually, one of them capitulates, and there's only one contestant left. He reaches for the pen, but the Lackey says, "Actually, I think you need a little more development. Swim it again, please. Backstroke."

And he does, of course.

I. A&R Scouts

Every major label involved in the hunt for new bands now has on staff a high-profile point man, an "A&R" rep who can present a comfortable face to any prospective band. The initials stand for "Artist and Repertoire," because historically, the A&R staff would select artists to record music that they had also selected, out of an available pool of each. This is still the case, though not openly.

These guys are universally young (about the same age as the bands being wooed), and nowadays they always have some obvious underground rock credibility flag they can wave. Lyle Preslar, former guitarist for Minor Threat, is one of them. Terry Tolkin, former NY independent booking agent and assistant manager at Touch and Go is one of them. Al Smith, former soundman at CBGB is one of them. Mike Gitter, former editor of XXX fanzine and contributor to Rip, Kerrang and other lowbrow rags is one of them. Many of the annoying turds who used to staff college radio stations are in their ranks as well.

There are several reasons A&R scouts are always young. The explanation usually copped-to is that the scout will be "hip" to the current musical "scene." A more important reason is that the bands will intuitively trust someone they think is a peer, and who speaks fondly of the same formative rock and roll experiences.

The A&R person is the first person to make contact with the band, and as such is the first person to promise them the moon. Who better to promise them the moon than an idealistic young turk who expects to be calling the shots in a few years, and who has had no previous experience with a big record company. Hell, he's as naive as the band he's duping. When he tells them no one will interfere in their creative process, he probably even believes it.

When he sits down with the band for the first time, over a plate of angel hair pasta, he can tell them with all sincerity that when they sign with company X, they're really signing with him and he's on their side. Remember that great gig I saw you at in '85? Didn't we have a blast.

By now all rock bands are wise enough to be suspicious of music industry scum. There is a pervasive caricature in popular culture of a portly, middle aged ex-hipster talking a mile-a-minute, using outdated jargon and calling everybody "baby." After meeting "their" A&R guy, the band will say to themselves and everyone else, "He's not like a record company guy at all! He's like one of us." And they will be right. That's one of the reasons he was hired.

These A&R guys are not allowed to write contracts. What they do is present the band with a letter of intent, or "deal memo," which loosely states some terms, and affirms that the band will sign with the label once a contract has been agreed on.

The spookiest thing about this harmless sounding little "memo," is that it is, for all legal purposes, a binding document. That is, once the band sign it, they are under obligation to conclude a deal with the label. If the label presents them with a contract that the band don't want to sign, all the label has to do is wait. There are a hundred other bands willing to sign the exact same contract, so the label is in a position of strength.

These letters never have any term of expiration, so the band remain bound by the deal memo until a contract is signed, no matter how long that takes. The band cannot sign to another label or even put out its own material unless they are released from their agreement, which never happens. Make no mistake about it: once a band has signed a letter of intent, they will either eventually sign a contract that suits the label or they will be destroyed.

One of my favorite bands was held hostage for the better part of two years by a slick young "He's not like a label guy at all," A&R rep, on the basis of such a deal memo. He had failed to come through on any of his promises (something he did with similar effect to another well-known band), and so the band wanted out. Another label expressed interest, but when the A&R man was asked to release the band, he said he would need money or points, or possibly both, before he would consider it.

The new label was afraid the price would be too dear, and they said no thanks. On the cusp of making their signature album, an excellent band, humiliated, broke up from the stress and the many months of inactivity.

II. There's This Band

There's this band. They're pretty ordinary, but they're also pretty good, so they've attracted some attention. They're signed to a moderate-sized "independent" label owned by a distribution company, and they have another two albums owed to the label.

They're a little ambitious. They'd like to get signed by a major label so they can have some security—you know, get some good equipment, tour in a proper tour bus— nothing fancy, just a little reward for all the hard work.

To that end, they got a manager. He knows some of the label guys, and he can shop their next project to all the right people. He takes his cut, sure, but it's only 15%, and if he can get them signed then it's money well spent. Anyway, it doesn't cost them any thing if it doesn't work. 15% of nothing isn't much!

One day an A&R scout calls them, says he's

"been following them for a while now," and when their manager mentioned them to him, it just "clicked." Would they like to meet with him about the possibility of working out a deal with his label? Wow. Big Break time.

They meet the guy, and y'know what—he's not what they expected from a label guy. He's young and dresses pretty much like the band does. He knows all their favorite bands. He's like one of them. He tells them he wants to go to bat for them, to try to get them everything they want. He says anything is possible with the right attitude. They conclude the evening by taking home a copy of a deal memo they wrote out and signed on the spot.

The A&R guy was full of great ideas, even talked about using a name producer. Butch Vig is out of the question—he wants 100 g's and three points, but they can get Don Fleming for $30,000 plus three points. Even that's a little steep, so maybe they'll go with that guy who used to be in David Letterman's band. He only wants three points. Or they can have just anybody record it (like Warton Tiers, maybe—cost you 5 or 10 grand) and have Andy Wallace remix it for 4 grand a track plus 2 points. It was a lot to think about.

Well, they like this guy and they trust him. Besides, they already signed the deal memo. He must have been serious about wanting them to sign. They break the news to their current label, and the label manager says he wants them to succeed, so they have his blessing. He will need to be compensated, of course, for the remaining albums left on their contract, but he'll work it out with the label himself. Sub Pop made millions from selling off Nirvana, and Twin Tone hasn't done bad either: 50 grand for the Babes and 60 grand for the Poster Children—without having to sell a single additional record. It'll be something modest. The new label doesn't mind, so long as it's recoupable out of royalties.

Well, they get the final contract, and it's not quite what they expected. They figure it's better to be safe than sorry and they turn it over to a lawyer—one who says he's experienced in entertainment law—and he hammers out a few bugs. They're still not sure about it, but the lawyer says he's seen a lot of contracts, and theirs is pretty good. They'll be getting a great royalty: 13% (less a 10% packaging deduction). Wasn't it Buffalo Tom that were only getting 12% less 10? Whatever.

The old label only wants 50 grand, and no points. Hell, Sub Pop got 3 points when they let Nirvana go. They're signed for four years, with options on each year, for a total of over a million dollars! That's a lot of money in any man's English. The first year's advance alone is $250,000. Just think about it, a quarter-million, just for being in a rock band!

Their manager thinks it's a great deal, especially the large advance. Besides, he knows a publishing company that will take the band on if they get signed, and even give them an advance of 20 grand, so they'll be making that money too. The manager says publishing is pretty mysterious, and nobody really knows where all the money comes from, but the lawyer can look that contract over too. Hell, it's free money.

Their booking agent is excited about the band signing to a major. He says they can maybe average $1,000 or $2,000 a night from now on. That's enough to justify a five week tour, and with tour support, they can use a proper crew, buy some good equipment and even get a tour bus! Buses are pretty expensive, but if you figure in the price of a hotel room for everybody in the band and crew, they're actually about the same cost. Some bands (like Therapy? and Sloan and Stereolab) use buses on their tours even when they're getting paid only a couple hundred bucks a night, and this tour should earn at least a grand or two every night. It'll be worth it. The band will be more comfortable and will play better.

The agent says a band on a major label can get a merchandising company to pay them an advance on t-shirt sales! Ridiculous! There's a gold mine here! The lawyer should look over the merchandising contract, just to be safe.

They get drunk at the signing party. Polaroids are taken and everybody looks thrilled. The label

picked them up in a limo.

They decided to go with the producer who used to be in Letterman's band. He had these technicians come in and tune the drums for them and tweak their amps and guitars. He had a guy bring in a slew of expensive old "vintage" microphones. Boy, were they "warm." He even had a guy come in and check the phase of all the equipment in the control room! Boy, was he professional. He used a bunch of equipment on them and by the end of it, they all agreed that it sounded very "punchy," yet "warm."

All that hard work paid off. With the help of a video, the album went like hotcakes! They sold a quarter million copies!

Here is the math that will explain just how fucked they are:

These figures are representative of amounts that appear in record contracts daily. There's no need to skew the figures to make the scenario look bad, since real-life examples more than abound. Income is underlined, expenses are not.

Advance: $250.000
Manager's cut: $37,500
Legal fees: $ 10,000

Recording Budget: $ 150,000
Producer's advance: $50,000
Studio fee: $52,500
Drum, Amp, Mic and Phase "Doctors": $3,000
Recording tape: $8,000
Equipment rental: $5,000
Cartage and Transportation: $5,000
Lodgings while in studio: $ 10,000
Catering: $3,000
Mastering: $10,000
Tape copies, reference CDs, shipping tapes, misc expenses: $2,000

Video budget: $30,000
Cameras: $8,000
Crew: $5,000
Processing and transfers: $3,000
Offline: $2,000
Online editing: $3,000
Catering: $1,000
Stage and construction: $3,000
Copies, couriers, transportation: $2,000
Director's fee: $3,000

Album Artwork: $5,000
Promotional photo shoot and duplication: $2,000

Band fund: $ 15,000
New fancy professional drum kit: $5,000
New fancy professional guitars (2): $3,000
New fancy professional guitar amp rigs (2): $4,000
New fancy potato-shaped bass guitar: $ 1,000
New fancy rack of lights bass amp:$1,000
Rehearsal space rental: $500

Big blowout party for their friends: $500

Tour expense (5 weeks): $50,875
Bus: $25,000
Crew (3): $7,500
Food and per diems: $7,875
Fuel: $3,000
Consumable supplies: $3,500
Wardrobe: $1,000
Promotion: $3,000

Tour gross income: $50.000
Agent's cut: $7,500
Manager's cut: $7,500

Merchandising advance: $20.000
Manager's cut: $3,000
Lawyer's fee: $1,000

Publishing advance: $20.000
Manager's cut: $3,000
Lawyer's fee: $1,000

Record sales: 250,000 @ $ 12 = $3,000,000
gross retail revenue Royalty (13% of 90% of retail): $351,000
Less advance: $250,000
Producer's points: (3% less $50,000 advance) $40,000
Promotional budget: $25,000
Recoupable buyout from previous label: $50,000
Net royalty: (-$14.000)

Record company income:
Record wholesale price $6.50 x 250,000 = $1,625,000 gross income
Artist Royalties: $351,000
Deficit from royalties: $14,000
Manufacturing, packaging and distribution @ $2.20 per record: $550,000
Gross profit: $710,000

The Balance Sheet: This is how much each player got paid at the end of the game.
Record company: $710,000
Producer: $90,000
Manager: $51,000
Studio: $52,500
Previous label: $50,000
Agent: $7,500
Lawyer: $12,000
Band member net income each: $4,031.25

The band is now 1/4 of the way through its contract, has made the music industry more than 3 million dollars richer, but is in the hole $14,000 on royalties. The band members have each earned about 1/3 as much as they would working at a 7-11, but they got to ride in a tour bus for a month.

The next album will be about the same, except that the record company will insist they spend more time and money on it. Since the previous one never "recouped," the band will have no leverage, and will oblige.

The next tour will be about the same, except the merchandising advance will have already been paid, and the band, strangely enough, won't have earned any royalties from their t-shirts yet. Maybe the t-shirt guys have figured out how to count money like record company guys.

Some of your friends are probably already this fucked.

EVERYTHING YOU'VE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAJOR LABELS

CORPORATE ROCK, PUNK?

by Brian Zero

They called it Hardcore when I first entered the punk scene in 1984, but it didn't matter because to a redneck you were always a "blue haired faggot." I was 15 then. The punk scene was not a beautiful place at that time, but it was honest; and in a world candy-coated by corporate smoke screens, where a president talked of family values while his foot soldiers smuggled drugs into the country, honesty counted for something. I fell in love with that honesty. And I found real people, proud people who stood up against the walls and barricades of ignorance to find the truth; and I saw proud people, good people beaten by nazi skinheads, rednecks, police officers, only to rise again, to be themselves again. To them, punk became not just some sort of prefabricated fashion or way to act tough, it became a source of strength, a culture, a tribe against a society seemingly hellbent on stripping us of any chance to stop and wonder about who we really are. And, like the individuals who understood that punk had become something more than just rebellious music, the scene would take its beatings from the money grubbing promoters, the stardom hungry bands, the insecure pit tyrants, only to rise again. There had developed a reciprocal relationship between the scene and its members, and to those who gave a fuck about the scene fell the burden of keeping it alive, because to them it meant something more--their sanity, their personality, the survival of their character was interdependent upon the survival of the scene.

In the last four years, a new threat has risen, the corporate interest in the punk/underground movement. Suddenly people and bands who grew up in the 80s punk scene are dealing with the same corporate entities that they once criticized. Am I missing something here? What has happened? Why are these people forgetting? What has changed in the world to justify this? Last year I became very angry when I heard that Green Day signed to Warner Brothers. I became angry enough to stage a demonstration in front of one of their shows in Petaluma, Calif. After this, I sent a letter to MRR and was promptly contacted by Tim Yohannan who asked if I wanted to write an article. Although somewhat late in coming, what you have before you is that article. Before you begin reading, let me tell you a few things: I was allowed to be as subjective as I wanted to, which means that although I will try to keep an open mind, I have a definite slant; in this case a strong anti-corporate slant. I'm sorry, I have just read and studied too much about corporations to smile while they rape the world. I hope that by reading this you will understand at least why one punk feels so strongly about this issue, because to me it's about survival: the scene has become my culture, and I don't like what I'm seeing. If for any reason you find what I have to say particularly upsetting, there is an address provided at the end of the article where I can be reached.

On April 29, 1985, the streets of downtown San Francisco were alive with a wide variety of people all intent on "Stopping the City" to protest a nation arming itself for a potential nuclear war. There must have been over a thousand of us, a great many were punkers; it was perhaps the wildest demo I've ever been on. The police followed us, but we ditched them in the maze-like streets of the city; punks spray painted buses, kicked over newspaper racks and ran wild in the streets, all in an attempt to wake people from their complacent acceptance of what was happening. Earlier in the day, we conducted a "War Chest Tour" of those corporations involved in the nuclear proliferation trade. In retrospect, it is the Subhumans song *Rats*, about the similar protests in England, which always reminds me of that 1985 SF demo and how the media responded to us.

EMI was not on the War Chest Tour's list that day, but that is only because EMI, or Thorn-EMI, is an English electrical company not located in the Bay Area. If they had been, they would have been a prime target. Thorn-EMI was, and is, a major defense contractor; they manufactured components for such missile systems as the Pershing, Cruise, and Trident; they supported the nuclear industry; and they would not divest from South Africa when there was a public outcry for companies to do so. One of the industries that EMI has connections to is the record industry--they own EMI Music, Virgin Records, Capitol, Chrysalis, etc. Recently, Virgin records purchased Caroline, a record production and distribution company, effectively making this once indie company a part of a sprawling multinational (EMI). About four or five months ago I contacted Caroline and asked for a catalog; I wanted to share with you some of the punk bands and labels whose material you can purchase through Caroline. Finally, about two weeks ago, I received my catalogue and I was surprised: Not only were there more punk bands being distributed through Caroline than I suspected, but so many of these bands have made (and are making) strong statements about issues ranging from sexism to animal liberation to the sort of corporation hegemony of which I address in this article. Sadly, to me at least, the Subhumans are one of these bands.

Below you will find just a *small* taste of the bands whose full length LPs you can purchase through Caroline. Listed beside each band in parenthesis is the number of LPs available through this source. I'm sure that many of these bands don't know of Caroline's connection to EMI; it may be true that some of these bands don't even know they are being distributed through Caroline, as often times bands just turn over their material to their label and allow the label to do what it wants with it. From some of the larger names, like Crass for example, it becomes harder to understand as they own their own label, Crass Records, and they've seemingly been so active for so long that you would expect them to know: Bad Religion (6), Bikini Kill (2), Bikini Kill/Huggy Bear (1), Blatz/Filth (1), Bratmobile (1), Broken Bones (1), Capitalist Casualties (1), Carry Nation (1), Christ On A Crutch (1), Chumbawamba (4), Citizen Fish (1), Conflict (1), Corrupted Morals (1), Crass (5), Crimpshrine (1), Cringer (2), Crucifucks (3), D.O.A. (6), Dag Nasty (4), Dead Kennedys (6), Diatribe (2), Dickies (2), Dicks (1), Down By Law (3), Droogies (1), Econochrist (1), Embrace (2), The Ex (3), False Prophets (2), Fidelity Jones (2), Fugazi (6), Gang Green (1), Girls Against Boys (3), Gorilla (1), Hard-Ons (4), Ignition (1), Ill Repute (1), Insted (1), J Church (3), Jawbreaker (1), Jello Boafra (6), Killdozer (6), Lard (2), Lookouts (2), MIA (2), MDC (7), Minor Threat (3), Mr. T Experience (3), Naked Aggression (2), Naked Raygun (3), Nation Of Ulysses (2), Neurosis (3), New Bomb Turks (3), NoFX(5), Nomeansno (11), Nuisance (2), Offspring (2), Operation Ivy (1), Pansy Division (1), Parasites (1), Pennywise (2), Poison Idea (6), Queers (1), Rancid (1), Raw Power (2), Reagan Youth (3), Reason To Believe (1), Rites Of Spring (1), Rudimentaty Peni (1), Scherzo (1), Scream (5), Screeching Weasel (4), Scum (1), 7 Seconds (1), Sewer Trout (1), Shudder To Think (4), Sleep (1), Spermbirds (1), Strawman (1), Subhumans (6), Superchunk (7), Thatcher On Acid/Wat Tyler (1), Tiger Trap (2), Tilt (2), Tribe 8 (1), U.K. Subs (7), Verbal Assault (2), Victims Family (3).

So what does this mean? Does this mean that if you buy a record and it's been distributed through Caroline

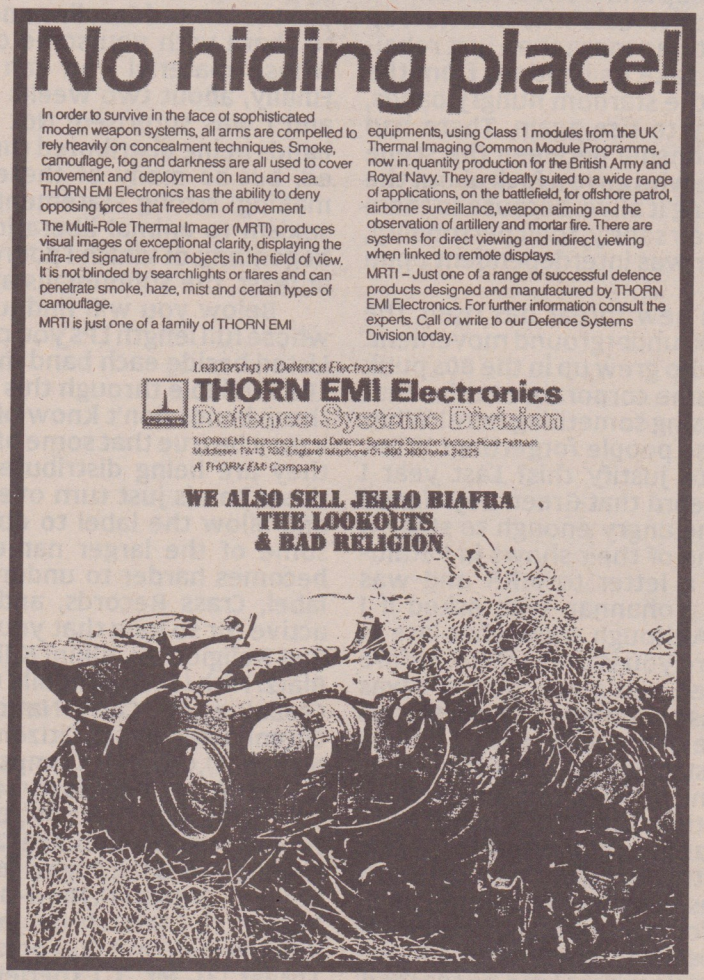
that EMI gets some of your money? The answer is yes. But I can't tell you how much. However, I don't think this is the real issue here: the issue is one of why we as an independent scene need to be attached to the mechanics of a multi-national corporation, and how does that attachment relate to the ideals of DIY ethics that our scene is supposed to possess?

After I talked with Kevin McCracken (a very close friend of mine who helps run Kirbdog Records) about Caroline, about who owns them, he decided to bring the issue up at the last Mordam convention. Apparently, the responses he received were quite ugly, were quite defensive of using Caroline. My understanding of the situation is this: Mordam distributes through Caroline at the request of its labels. In this case, the two biggest labels on Mordam--Lookout and Alternative Tentacles, wish to keep selling merchandise through Caroline, because, according to the argument, Caroline gets material out to those Bumfuck, Egypt places out there in the world.

This is what Greg Werckman, General Manager of Alternative Tentacles, has to say about the whole topic of dealing with Caroline: "Alternative Tentacles is distributed exclusively through Mordam Records. Mordam in turn sells to other stores and distributors including Caroline. Granted, in a perfect world we wouldn't want to have anything to do with distributors like Caroline and Relativity. But if we can use their channels to spread our message around and to hopefully enlighten some people, I don't think it is a legitimate problem. The people at Caroline that I've met are pretty cool and seem to really enjoy the music and our ideals. Unfortunately, in just about all aspects of our life, one can trace back to a major corporation. A percent of every CD made is paid to the Philips Corporation because they have the copyright on the format. Does this mean that everyone that makes CDs is bad and part of the evil arms building empire? If I drink coke, wear Nike shoes, drive a Volvo or any foreign car or use gasoline in my American car, should I [be] chastised? Is it worse to support arms builders or destroy the environment by wasting paper or driving my car? This politically correct stuff is usually too dogmatic and, believe me, fighting with people that use Caroline to distribute independent records is fighting with your own team. Know your enemy. Plus once again, where is the punk rule book and does every one have to play by it?"

Greg's argument is the one which you will hear time and again from people in the punk scene who are making the transition from independent distribution and production to more corporate methods: the corporate sources are better at getting your art or message out to harder to reach areas; and as far as the ethical dilemma in dealing with corporations is concerned, the world is pretty much fucked anyway and controlled by corporate sources, so where do you draw the line?

Well, where do we draw the line? Certainly, if Joseph Goebbels came to your door and told you he wished to distribute your records, you would give pause. Besides saying no, you might wonder what motive Joseph Goebbels would have in distributing your material. How would it benefit him? But why aren't people wondering about the corporate motive in distributing and manufacturing punk material? I agree with Greg, we should know who the enemy is. And I agree, the enemy is not the bands and individuals who choose to work through Caroline, or even those nice workers at Caroline themselves; it's the behemoth structure that they have decided to support through their actions or even apathetic denial. In the business world, the word 'enemy' is replaced by the word 'competition,' and that's just what the independent punk scene has become in the eyes of the music industry. So let's take a look at the competition and what there motives could be.


No hiding place!
In order to survive in the face of sophisticated modern weapon systems, all arms are compelled to rely heavily on concealment techniques. Smoke, camouflage, fog and darkness are all used to cover movement and deployment on land and sea. THORN EMI Electronics has the ability to deny opposing forces that freedom of movement.
The Multi-Role Thermal Imager (MRTI) produces visual images of exceptional clarity, displaying the infra-red signature from objects in the field of view. It is not blinded by searchlights or flares and can penetrate smoke, haze, mist and certain types of camouflage.
MRTI is just one of a family of THORN EMI equipments, using Class 1 modules from the UK Thermal Imaging Common Module Programme, now in quantity production for the British Army and Royal Navy. They are ideally suited to a wide range of applications, on the battlefield, for offshore patrol, airborne surveillance, weapon aiming and the observation of artillery and mortar fire. There are systems for direct viewing and indirect viewing when linked to remote displays.
MRTI – Just one of a range of successful defence products designed and manufactured by THORN EMI Electronics. For further information consult the experts. Call or write to our Defence Systems Division today.
Leadership in Defence Electronics
THORN EMI Electronics
Defence Systems Division
A THORN EMI Company
WE ALSO SELL JELLO BIAFRA
THE LOOKOUTS
& BAD RELIGION

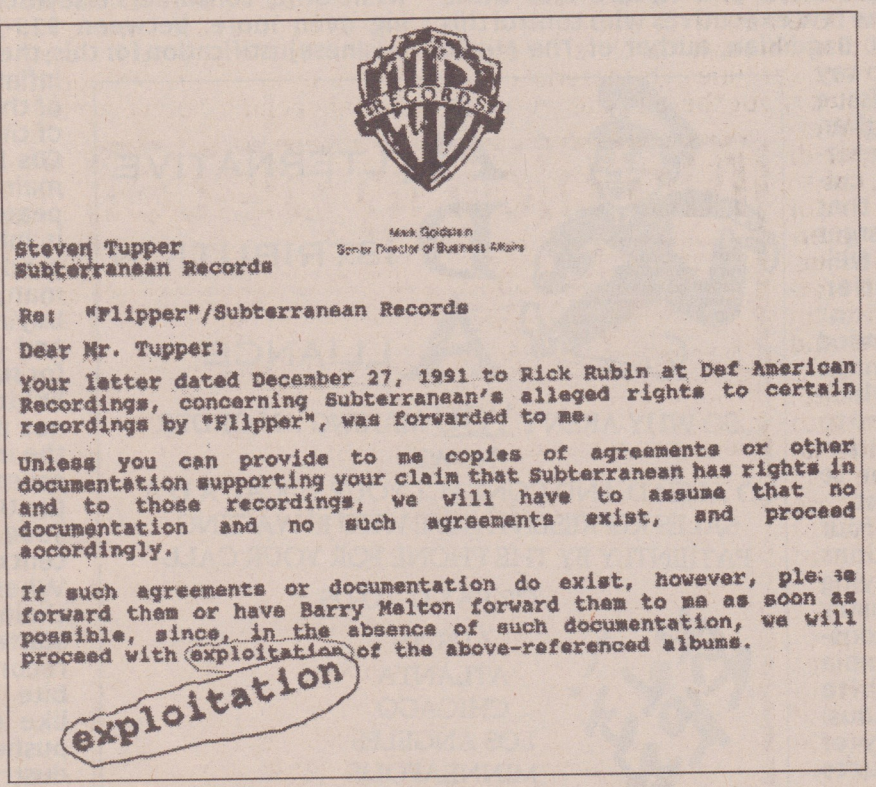
Before we began, I believe it would clarify some confusion if we distinguish what the difference is between an independent and a major label. The actual definition of a major label is one that produces and distributes its own material. But in practical terms, there are only six major labels: WEA, owned by Time Warner; UNI owned by Matshushita, a Japanese Electronics firm (makers of Panasonic products); Sony Music owned by Sony; Polygram owned by Philips NV; EMI; and BMG, a German Publishing Group. As you can plainly see, the six major labels (and their respective hordes of subsidiaries) are owned by mega-billion dollar corporations; hence, the term 'corporate' is a perfect substitute for the word 'major.'

At one time in this country, the record industry was diversified: distribution was mostly independent, and there were more independent mediums (labels) to work with. This is not to say that "independent" equals good; there are plenty of examples of independent labels screwing over their artists. What diversification meant, however, was that less power to shape and affect an entire industry and the society connected to that industry was concentrated in more hands.

It is the purpose of any corporation to grow, to spread itself. In order to do so, the competition must either be eliminated or assimilated. In the late 70s, the majors started making deals to distribute some of the larger more powerful independent labels; they also started buying up many of these labels--e.g., Geffen, Virgin, A&M, etc. Besides buying them out, the major labels had other business tricks up their sleeves to

eliminate the independents. Not only were corporate labels able to invest more money in advertising and promotion, due to the immense financial backing of their parent companies, but they were able to invest their money in the Network, a coalition of shady underworld characters who engaged in payola (bribes in the form of cash or drugs usually) to have radio stations play their music. According to Fredric Dannen in his book *HitMen*, during the 1980s a major label like CBS Records could spend between 12.8 million and 17 million dollars a year on Network promotion. By the 1990s, independent distribution, with exceptions provided by the activities of such groups as the punk scene, was nearly extinct. Meanwhile, the US. record industry had developed into a 6.3 billion dollar enterprise.

At the same time that Network promotion was in full swing, another alarming trend was enveloping the record industry–that of corporate mergers, where the major labels, which had themselves started swallowing up other labels, began to be purchased in whole by gigantic corporate groups. As you may be able to tell, of the six major label groups, four are now owned by huge multi-national electronics firms, and two are owned by publication mega-giants. All of these parent corporations who control the record industry have connections to practices which raise serious ethical questions (with the exception, *perhaps*, of BMG–all I know about them is that they are a gigantic German Publishing company).



WB RECORDS

Mark Goldstein
Senior Director of Business Affairs

Steven Tupper
Subterranean Records

Re: "Flipper"/Subterranean Records

Dear Mr. Tupper:

Your letter dated December 27, 1991 to Rick Rubin at Def American Recordings, concerning Subterranean's alleged rights to certain recordings by "Flipper", was forwarded to me.

Unless you can provide to me copies of agreements or other documentation supporting your claim that Subterranean has rights in and to those recordings, we will have to assume that no documentation and no such agreements exist, and proceed accordingly.

If such agreements or documentation do exist, however, please forward them or have Barry Melton forward them to me as soon as possible, since, in the absence of such documentation, we will proceed with exploitation of the above-referenced albums.

exploitation

Both Sony (owns CBS Music, and their subsidiaries) and Matsushita (owns MCA, and their subsidiaries) are heavily involved in the Pacific Basin area, with factories in countries like Indonesia, a country ruled by General Suharto and his militaristic regime. General Suharto became president of Indonesia in 1965 after a US supported coup brought him to power. It has been estimated that his forces slaughtered up to one million people soon thereafter. In December 1975, Indonesian forces invaded East Timor, inflicting genocide on the people there. According to the East Timor Action Network, an estimated 200,000 people, one third of East Timor's pre-1975 population, were killed; massacres, torture, extra judicial executions, and arbitrary arrests still occur regularly.

Labor conditions in Indonesia are deplorable. Assembly line workers typically make a bit over $1 a day. Without unions or any effective labor protection force, corporations are able to enter Indonesia and apply practices that would cause the inhabitants of their home countries to revolt: forced overtime, attaching the cost of factory-provided transportation to an employees wages, etc. Currently, Sony has a factory in Bekasi, Indonesia, where workers assemble 350,000 CD boomboxes a month, 60% of which are destined for the US. Matsushita has a plant in Bekasi, as well, which produces a 100,000 VCRs a month.

Here in America, Sony has been recently cited for illegally using photos of workers at plants in New York and New Jersey in an anti-union smear campaign.

Like EMI, Philips NV is a Dutch company with a history in the production of defense industry electronics: missile-distance systems, microcircuits for military application, sights for armored vehicles, etc. They also own 25% of the stock of Whittle Communications (see Time-Warner below).

Time-Warner is the largest publishing group in this nation, the second largest cable group, one of the four largest motion picture manufacturers/distributors, and perhaps the largest record company (either them or Sony). They were voted one of the top ten worst corporations of 1992 by the *Multi-National Monitor*, a publication started by Ralph Nader with the purpose of exposing the activities of corporations around the globe. In September 1991, Time-Warner laid off 600 magazine employees while at the same time making then-Warner chair Steve Ross the most highly compensated CEO in the US with a salary and stock option package worth more than $78 million. Time-Warner engages in corporate interlocking with such other companies as General Dynamics, a defense contractor, and Mobil Oil, an environmental polluter. What the process of interlocking entails is the sharing of board directors and CEOs between companies.

Time-Warner is the majority stockholder in Whittle Communications, a controversial advertising company known specifically for Channel One--a television news program beamed by satellite to 6.6 million teenagers in over 9,000 high schools. Schools that agree to show the 12 minute program receive video and other media-related equipment in trade. The profit for Whittle comes from the fact that 2 minutes of the programming is paid advertising for products such as Nike shoes and Skittles candy. In schools that run these programs, it is compulsory for students to watch them. Whittle is currently embarking on the "Edison Project," an attempt to set up 200 private for-profit schools by 1996. This project will be funded by such groups as Apple and IBM computers, and lunchroom concessions will be controlled by companies like McDonalds, Pizza Hut, etc. The Edison project has no plan for school libraries. Peggy Charan President of Action for Children's Television told the *Multi National*

Monitor that the Edison Project may represent "the beginning of the downfall of education in America."

Perhaps the most pertinent questions about all of these corporations arise when we focus on just how much power they are amassing, and the house of hegemony they are building. In 1983, most of this country's broadcast and film business, newspaper, magazine and book publishers were owned by 50 corporations; by 1987 that number had dropped to 29 companies; what it is now must be significantly less–I do not know. What I do know is that this trend of consolidating media and art into the hands of fewer but more powerful groups--such as the mega-group created when Time and Warner merged in the late 1980s--is effectively surrendering control of ideas, expressions and culture into those hands. In regards to the few executives who control this media empire, Ben H. Bagdikian, author of *The Media Monopoly*, had this to say in the June 12, 1989 issue of *The Nation*: "Together, they exert a homogenizing power over ideas, culture and commerce that affects populations larger than any in History. Neither Caesar nor Hitler, Franklin Roosevelt nor any Pope, has commanded as much power to shape the information on which so many people depend to make decisions about everything from whom to vote for to what to eat."

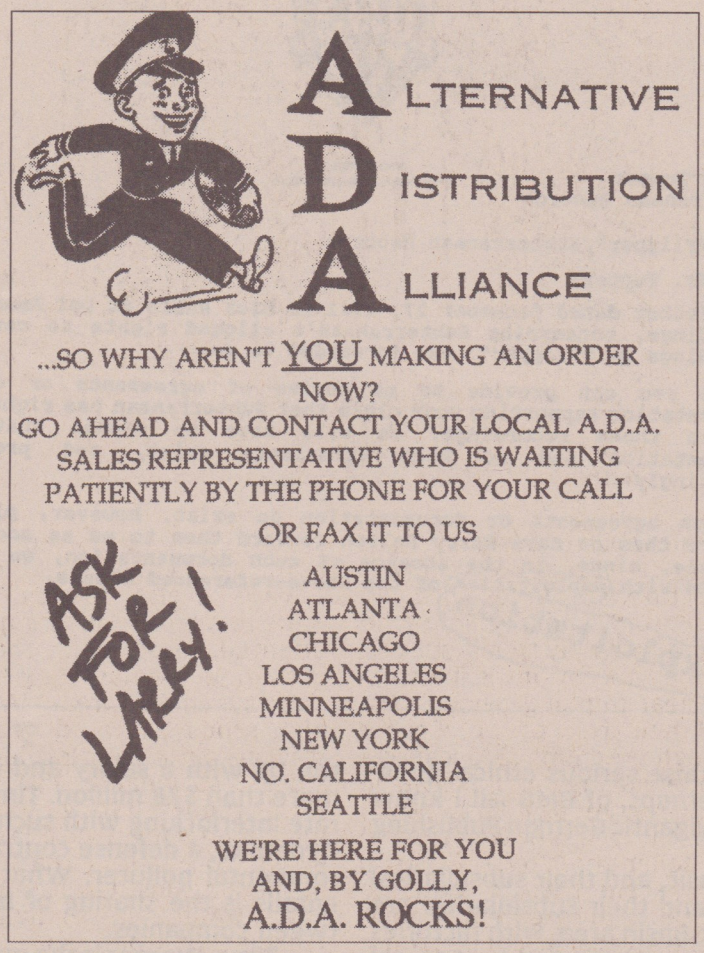
In the case of the four electronics corporations mentioned above, buying into the record industry and into the movie industry (Sony owns Columbia Pictures, Matshushita owns Universal Studious) is just one more way of getting their products onto store shelves and into people's homes. A good example of this oligopoly is how they used the CD to push vinyl nearly out of existence. If they decide in ten years that CDs are obsolete and that they want people to buy a new music device, all they need to do is release material in nothing but that device's format. And as they dominate the market from raw material production to distribution, what is there to stop them? What is there to stop a Time-Warner magazine such as *People* from carrying stories about WEA recording artists? Objective journalism? *Time* magazine has an unwritten policy to warn cigarette advertisers when there is going to be an anti-smoking article in one of their magazines, so that the tobacco companies can choose not to advertise in that issue. What is there to stop the consolidation of corporate power from growing, from merging even more and controlling yet more channels? Strong regulations?

The Reagan era saw the softening of anti-trust laws and regulations. For example, The Justice Department received 10,723 pre-merger notifications between 1981 and 1987 and challenged only 26 of those deals. Has it become tougher for the corporations and their power grab tactics since Clinton became president? Recently, Viacom Video, home to such cable channels as MTV, purchased the entire Paramount Entertainment empire.

The only force that could safeguard us all from the corporations appears to be not only the buying force of the consumers, but the force of artists, and other inventors to choose whether they wish their product to support these mega-industries.

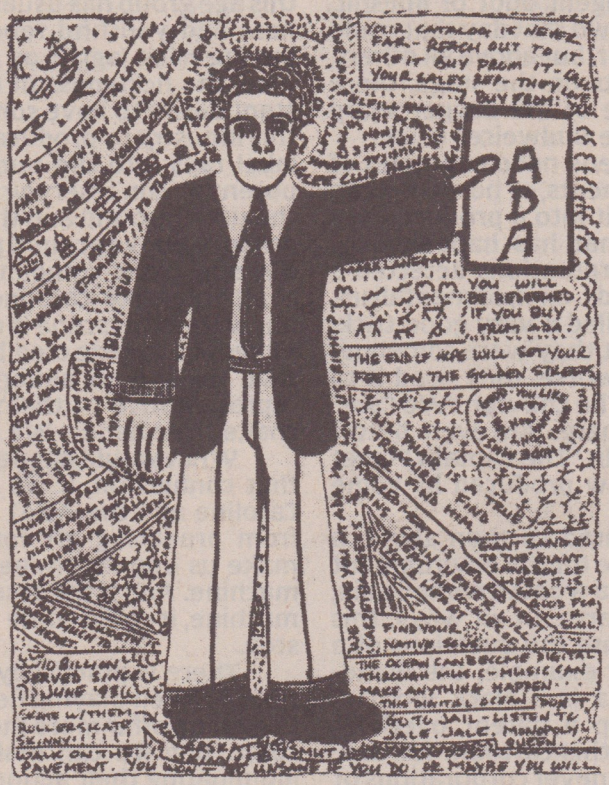
The type of buying threat that consumers pose to these industries can be seen in the recent controversy over the sale of used CDs. CDs are notoriously cheap to produce, cheaper than LPs, yet for some reason they are more expensive to buy than LPs, up to $17 each. Meanwhile other consumers elsewhere in the world are paying even more, between $25-$30 a CD. There is no business justification for this; these are simply artificially inflated prices for the profit of the industry. Perhaps one of the better features of the CDs is that the material remains unchanged after repeated playing; thus, the CD is inherently always a new product. For this reason, many stores have started buying back CDs from people and in turn re-selling them for substantially less money. Evidently, consumers are not as ignorant as some in the industry might hope because the sale of used CDs in the US in 1992 accounted for $500 million in sales, 10 percent of all CD sales. When the Wherehouse, a major retail chain with over 300 stores, started selling used CDs, the record industry began to bite back. Wealthy artists like Garthe Brookes were pushed forward by the industry as advocates against the sale of used CDs only to be met by demonstrations such as one in the Bay Area where Garthe Brookes CDs were roasted on barbecue grills. The more menacing move by the industry has been the cutting of "co-op" advertising to record stores that sell used CDs, a move that accents how co-dependent record stores have become of the industry. With "co-op" advertising, a store that sells a release of a major label artist can have most of the costs of advertising that release underwritten by the artist's label. Although the effects of cutting "co-op" funds are minimal on a small store, on a chain of stores like the Wherehouse, this is a major step, and has caused the Wherehouse to respond with a lawsuit alleging that the distributors "conspired to unreasonably restrain trade and commerce in used CDs."

The record corporations, like all corporations, rely on the ability and willingness for consumers to buy products. A consumer who walks down the aisles of products in a store wondering about the necessity of these items in their lives is not a good consumer; in the eyes of big business, this sort of consumer is a problem. When a consumer starts telling their friends about the



questionable nature of the corporations behind the products, that consumer is no longer simply a problem–they are a threat.

Once upon a time, if I were to pick a group of people who I thought of as representing that threat, I would have probably picked the punk scene. I'm no longer sure about this. Instead of rising up with intelligence against a corporate challenge, many in the punk scene are rising up with a sense of apathy. Worse, many are defending this apathy by either accepting how corporate the world has become as a reason not to fight against it (the old 'lost cause' or 'if you can't beat them join them' arguments), or by pointing the finger at those against punk becoming corporate rock as being 'PC' dogmatists.


ADA
YOUR CATALOGS IS NEVER FAR- REACH OUT TO IT. USE IT. BUY FROM IT. CALL YOUR SALES REP- THEY LIVE TO BUY FROM!
YOU WILL BE REWARDED IF YOU BUY FROM ADA
THE END OF HERE WILL GET YOUR FEET ON THE GOLDEN STREETS
FIND YOUR NATIVE SON
GO TO JAIL - LISTEN TO JAZZ. JAZZ. MONOPOLY!
SKATE W/THEM ROLLERSKATE SKINNY!!!!
WALK ON THE PAVEMENT. YOU WON'T BE UNSANE IF YOU DO. BE. MAYBE YOU WILL

I understand how corporate the world has become. Quite honestly, it is probably impossible for your dollars not to end up in a dirty pocket somewhere. But to me, there is a difference in purchasing what survival in this society has forced you to consume, and contributing your ideas or art to something awful. In short, I can understand the low income family purchasing GE light bulbs better than I can understand some well educated individual who should know better designing light bulbs for GE, and making a bundle at it. Quite simply, it has been possible to manufacture light bulbs with 100 year life spans for nearly a century, and anybody who knows this fact and works for a company that is suckering people--and is a part of that deception--is inexcusable. In the same vein, any clear thinking person who chooses to support the sale of their art, or the art of other people for that matter, through mediums as deceptive and greedy as GE are also engaging in inexcusable actions. But what if everybody is greedy and deceptive? I would choose to support those with less power. I would have less difficulty with my dollar going to some small scale Joe Asshole in the punk scene than to the large record corporations. Why? Because the greater the power and size of a corporation, the greater its connection is to real power in this world. Can Joe Asshole reach out through mass media and tell people what to buy; does Joe Asshole frequently meet with the heads of governments to talk about their policies. I'm not saying that it is ok to tolerate Joe; what I'm saying is that the real power comparison between an indie punk label and a major label is absurd. And if Joe is that much of a problem, it would be a great deal easier to abstain from his products and his petty source of power than some corporation that has made our lives co-dependent on their actions.

As far as punks who are against corporate rock being labeled "PC" goes, I believe there are currently two groups of people in this society who are relying on the PC acronym: well-to-do yuppie politicos trying desperately to look hip (usually failing) and guilt ridden do-nothings who like to make themselves feel better by comparing anybody who gives a shit to the former group. In short, "PC" is just a buzzword; and it should have little relevance on the truth or validity of someone's argument; and I feel its usage in this context is simply a backdoor escape route being employed by those afraid of the truth tagging them.

At about the same time I received my Caroline catalog, I received another catalog from another corporate-controlled distributor of Punk/Underground music, the ADA, or the "Alternative Distribution Alliance." Unlike Caroline with somewhat of a history in the punk scene, the ADA was just recently created from the mind of WEA. This is the label that SubPop distributes through now that they have settled their $12 million dollar fraud suit against their former distributor--Caroline. The ADA's catalog is assembled in newsprint with a cut-and-paste cover manufactured to look like a piece of punk literature. Nowhere inside is there any reference to the fact that this is a Warner controlled company. Included in my catalog was a questionnaire–the ADA apparently assumed that I was a record store. Like the catalog, the questionnaire was designed to have a sort of "punky" feel to it: there were questions like "If you had to shoot just one person who would it be?", "Have you ever stayed in a room at Anton Lavey's private hotel?", "What question would you put here?" But the majority of the questions were more business oriented, more along the lines of actual information gathering: "What clubs/venues are located in your store's general area?","Are any universities/colleges/high schools located near your store?", "What radio stations air in your locale?", "Do you play music in your store? If so, what format can/do you play?", "Do you sell used products (CDs, vinyl, etc., honest because we think it's a *good* thing.)?" This last question I found particularly ironic, considering that WEA was one of the major pushers against the sale of used CDs. Is there a reason why ADA is trying to make itself look punky? Is there a reason that when you drive into predominantly black neighborhoods McDonald's ads suddenly turn into ads for "Micky D's?"

On "Earth Day" of 1990, I found myself at Chrissy Field in San Francisco for the big celebration. Along with some friends, I handed out literature about why eating animal flesh was harmful for the environment. It seemed reasonable to assume that an event that was supposed to be environmentally-oriented would be an ideal place to hand out environmentally oriented literature, but people were too busy making their way to a huge multicolored Budweiser truck nearby to take time to listen to what we were saying. As the day progressed, things became very hot and the huge crowds of people started to nearly stampede, kicking up choking dust clouds; and strangely, garbage started to pile up--an empty Budweiser cup here, a styrofoam lunch tray covered with ketchup there, etc. Something else started to happen: the

gophers that lived on Chrissy Field began emerging from their holes–all those marching feet had driven them out. Soon the carcasses of crushed gophers were spotted. Meanwhile, on the main stage, surrounded by a herd thousands strong, celebrities were speaking about environmentalism between celebrity bands. Somehow, in the dust there soon arose a pungent odor of bullshit. There were many horns in the crowd that day that could account for the source of that odor, but above all others, even above the prominent points on the stage, there reigns in my memory the image of the dagger sharp contradictions emerging from the Budweiser truck.

If the people in the punk scene need examples of how corporations fuck up movements, of how they can take a valid statement and turn it into a product, they need to go no farther than what has happened to environmentalism. When the corporations detected a sentiment in this society towards environmentalism, instead of fighting back, they pulled a very good trick: they manufactured an image that they were somehow behind saving the planet--even worse, they used it to sell their questionable products. The Chevron "We Care" ads are just the tip of the iceberg. An even better example, I believe, can be found in "The Captain Planet and the Planeteers" Cartoon show produced by some Turner Broadcasting subsidiary.

In this rather poorly animated cartoon show, a group of young superheroes battle for the environment with the aid of Captain Planet and a woman named Gaia, who is supposed to represent earth. In all ways, this cartoon is manufactured to placate the questions of a politically motivated parent. For example, the Planeteers are multi-cultural and Gaia is a black woman. These considerations might help a parent overlook some important implications of this cartoon: for one, the enemies of the Planeteers are never corporations or institutions such as governments, they are instead a group of bungling, goofy individuals. In short, the message to children is not that environmental destruction is institutionalized, but rather the work of a few bad misfits. Indeed, governments in the program are portrayed as trying to help end environmental destruction, as opposed to the reality of governments covering up what's really happening or sinking vessels that belong to those who are working for environmental protection, aka Rainbow Warrior. But then it's also easier to sell an image if it's neat for kids to look at, and that's at the core of what "Captain Planet" is all about–selling something.

"Captain Planet" is simply an advertisement, like so many other cartoons, for toy figures of its characters. Never mind the fact that the majority of these types of figures are made in China, a major human rights violator, but they are made of polystyrene, or plastic, a material that is not recyclable. What a surprise to find that "Captain Planet" is an environmental polluter! What a surprise to find that "Captain Planet"'s adversaries don't include Edgar S. Woolard, Jr., CEO of DuPont, the world's single largest producer of ozone depleting CFCs. Not only would a villainous Edgar S. Woolard doll be a little too truthful, but how could it be made saleable to kids: it has no neat tricks, it doesn't fire off its arms off, it only wears a suit and tie. Perhaps they could have made it capable of producing an aerosol mist if you pressed a button on the back of its neck.

If corporations can use an icon to sell an anti-environmental product as environmentalism, how do you think they conform and sell musical/artistic movements? They find an icon(s) who represents that movement and who will work for them, sell the movement as an image for them: the living version of "Captain Planet". The music industry, like any industry, is constantly on the lookout for new marketable icons. Presently, many of the big icons in the industry are getting older. In an industry which sees its market in the 13-25 year old age range, this becomes a problem: the saleability of icons to this age group has usually been linked to their youthfulness and youthful rebelliousness. In short, nobody is buying Mick Jagger as a young angry rebel any more. Also, the fickleness of the present consumer, the constant desire to have something new, places pressure on this industry to produce something new. When a major label taps into the punk scene they're tapping into a potential icon reservoir, they are seeing who is selling in the underground and theorizing what they will need to produce above ground to sell similarly. The reason they develop front companies like the ADA, or purchase companies like Caroline, is simply for credibility: they know that this scene is one where suit and tie corporate images have little credibility and are banking on the fact that we are so superficial that if approached by a representative of theirs made to look like us, we will shake their hands. We should find this insulting.

What would happen if we did not shake hands with that connection, if we abstained from such groups as Caroline and the ADA? One thing is certain, abstaining from producing art for the corporate benefit would make us one less mine of resources for the corporate machine. And if the resources some how dry up for this machine, it could come to a great smoke filled, crashing stop.

There is practically no way to defeat the corporations on their playing field: we certainly can't out advertise them, offer more money than they do, take them to court. But we can make them look so ridiculous by illuminating their actions that other people will understand just why we as a scene hate corporate rock. But in order to do this, we would have to do something at least on this one issue which many in the scene find hard to deal with, we would have to unify. In order to best begin doing this we should take a look at what Greg calls the "punk rule book."

The way I see it, this book is balanced precariously on an edge overlooking the great corporate garbage can; this is where corporations come to shred the countless philosophies and human precepts that tell them what they are doing is wrong; it's also where they come to cut and paste their own images into the books of other groups which they have nothing to do with. When these books are fully subverted by the corporate image, and nobody wants to pay to see them anymore, they also ends up in the garbage. If you look into the can you can see the shredded remains of a hippie intermingling with something to the effect of ITT helping to overthrow the democratically elected regime of Chile circa 1973. Take a look at the punk rule book. It is a journal with mostly blank pages. Near the front however, you can see the rough edges of pages that were torn out. This is where cut-and-paste Sid Vicious, the Clash, and Billy Idol once were located. Who tore out these images? Who created them in the first place? Was it you? After these pages, you see there is a new cut-and-paste image forming; it looks like the character on the cover of some punk zine, but yet it doesn't; you can't tell what it is about the image, but there is insincerity in those cut-and-paste eyes. And there are words surrounding it, words that look like they say something, but they start to form phrases like "buy from it!" The image starts to look like a zombie, with blood stained eyes, holding an ADA sign.

If I could cut-and-paste an image of what punk rock

is now, it would probably anger a great deal of people. My cut-and-paste version of punk would abstain from the consumption of animal products, abstain from drug use (TV included), and be politically involved. I know that to many in this scene, punk is something entirely different. Therefore, I'm willing to leave this book clean of my own interpretation; for in my heart I will paste my image of what it's supposed to be about to me. What I am not willing to accept, however, is some corporate created golem dictating to me what we are supposed to be about. I invite you to take a look at the ADA cover supplied with this article and tell me whether you see something similar to what I see. If you think there is a problem with the way corporations are approaching and marketing punk music, if you question the way corporations behave in general, there are many things you as an individual can do and we as a scene can do to move away from and against corporate rock.

One of the things that you can do is to educate yourself. You can start reading publications about corporations and about the various ways they make and shape the policies that determine our lives. Two excellent publications to start with are *The Multi-National Monitor*, a publication started by Ralph Nader with the implicit purpose of covering the shadier tactics of the corporations, a publication remarkably free of the sort of "PC" dogma that seems to annoy so many punks these days; and there is also the *Boycott Quarterly*, a publication that covers the many boycotts in this country and why they are happening. If you are unsure about just how sleazy the record industry is, three good books to check out are *Hitmen*, *Rockonomics*, and *Money For Nothing*.

Once armed with knowledge, a phrase such as "corporate rock sucks" takes on a new validity, and you can start actually applying it and intelligently discussing why it sucks to friends and others in your area. You can also do what many in this scene should have been doing all along: you can ignore and personally boycott bands which seem to be MTV bound, or even bands that don't give a shit about their audiences. Also, you can write to the bands and labels who are currently distributing through Caroline and ask them why they are doing so. As I stated earlier in this article, many of the bands might simply not know and would like to be informed that their friends (fans) don't like it. It also wouldn't hurt to write to Lookout and Alternative tentacles and tell them you think their policy of distributing through Caroline sucks. I can guarantee that if these labels pull out of Caroline, all of the labels distributing through Mordam will do likewise. Some, like MRR, already have. If some corporate rock band comes to town and you hear them calling themselves punk or whatever, you can stand outside their shows handing out leaflets explaining what the difference is between corporate rock and punk rock.

As far as the scene goes, I think that we are fortunate in that the corporations have left us with many openings through which we can lambast them and their tactics. One of the biggest lemons that corporate labels have been cramming down the throats of music consumers over the last four years is what they have been calling 'Alternative.' Even mainstream rock critics have started to wonder what this oxymoron means. Alternative? Alternative to what? What if the punk scene started pointing the finger at the ADA and the entire 'alternative' music movement as yet another example of corporate fraud? And when the industry pushes forth a representative of what we are supposed to be, and tries to link the punk scene with the "alternative nation," we can vehemently deny any resemblance by citing that we as a scene are more than symbols and more than icons. Quite simply, if they want to call a band like Green Day "Pop-Punk", we can call Green Day the next Billy Idol.

This means that we should start to realize what many in this scene have realized for a long time, that we are on strike against the bullshit of this world, that the corporations are the main source of bullshit in this world, and punk bands who deal with them are effectively strikebreakers. This doesn't mean that we should hate the members of these bands, it simply means that we should let them know that they have made their choice, and that this scene won't coddle them any longer. They have entered the world of mass marketing symbols, and should accept the decision that led them to that world.

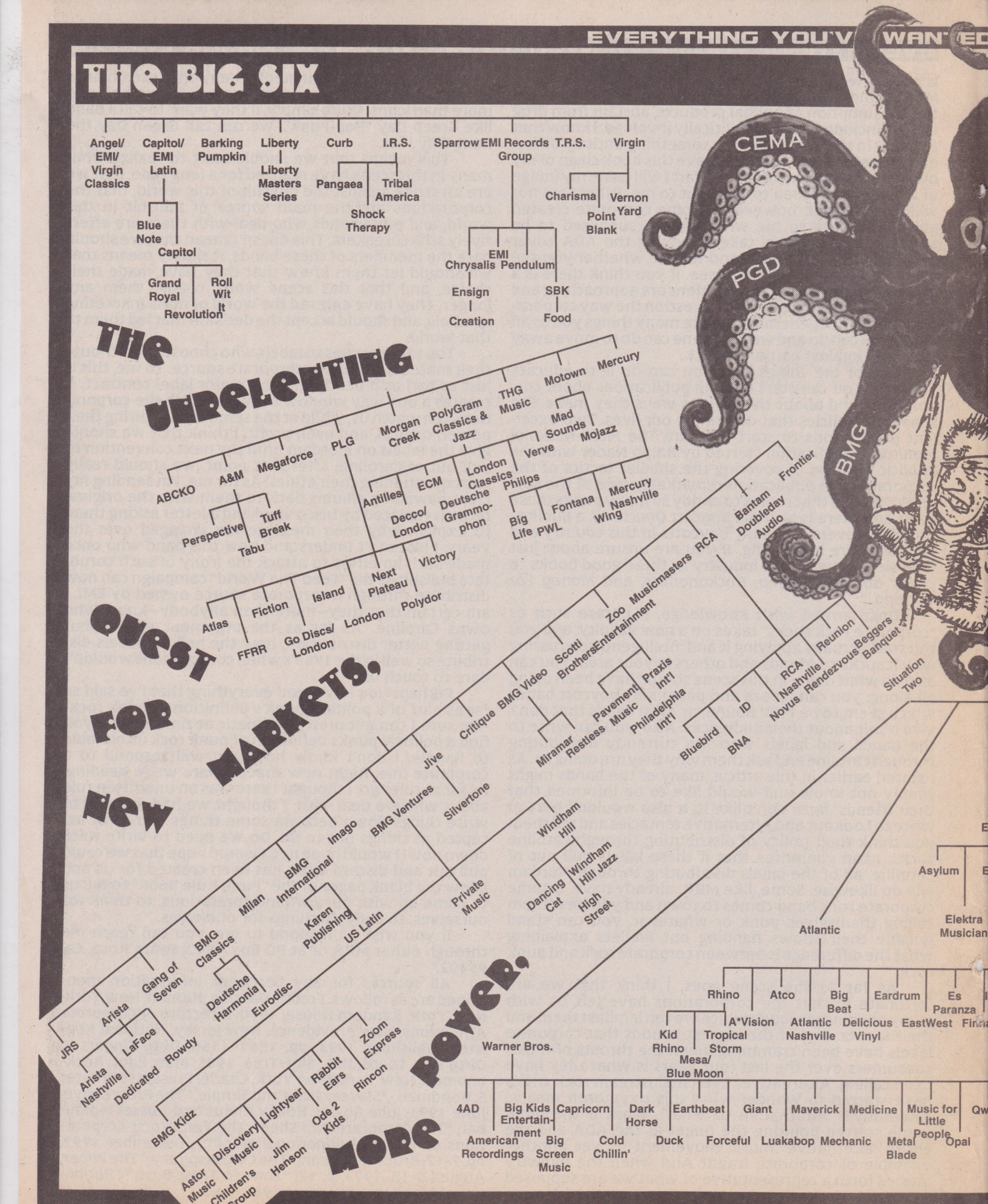
The same applies to labels who choose to distribute their material through a corporate source. To me, this is just as bad as a band signing a major label contract: it creates a one way window through which the corporations can watch us, while at the same time insuring their power, control, and even profit. I think that we should give the labels on Mordam until the next convention to pull out of Caroline; after that point, we should really start questioning their ethics. As for me, I'm sending my Chumbawamba albums back to them with the original records replaced by Disco vinyl and a letter asking them to explain why their message has changed over the years. I just can't understand how this band who once made such an effort to attack the irony of such corporate bullshit as the "Feed The World" campaign can now distribute through a corporate source owned by EMI. I am certain that they--more than anybody--know who owns Caroline. As far as the argument goes about getting better distribution, how the hell did labels distribute so well in the 1980's when corporations wouldn't dare to touch us?

Perhaps you have read everything that I've said so far as part of a political punk's definition of punk rock--I'm sure I can get pretty dogmatic at times. But if you find a political punks definition of punk rock intolerable to handle, I don't know how you will respond to a corporate one. Right now that's where we're heading. As far as rules go, I thought there was an unwritten rule about who we deal with; I thought we had no need to write things down because some things were just accepted as things not to do. Do we need to write rules down now? I would hope not. I would hope that we could pull out and discard what has been created for us and allow the blank pages of the "Punk Rule Book" to tell us to come up with our own interpretations, to think for ourselves, to truly do things for ourselves.

If you wish to respond to me, you can reach me through either MRR or at PO Box 4842, Santa Rosa, Ca. 95402.

All sources for any pertinent information mentioned are as follows: Fredric Dannen, *Hitmen*, New York, New York, Random House, 1990; *Directory of Corporate Affiliations*, New Providence, New Jersey, National Register Publishing, 1993, pp. 1561–1566; *Dirty Fingers in Dirty Pies*, Leeds, U.K., Sky+Tree, 1985; Marc Eliot, *Rockonomics*, New York, New York, Citadel Press, 1993; Peter S. Goodman, ,"Slavery Plain and Simple," *The Progressive*, June 1993; Julie Gozan, Holley Knaus and Russel Mokhiber, "The Corporate Rap Sheet: The Ten Worst Corporations of 1992," *Multinational Monitor*, December 1992, pp. 7-17; Bruce Robinson, "The CD Conspiracy," *The Paper*, August 5-18, 1993, p. 17; "Time to Trust Bust," *Multinational Monitor*, November 1989, p.6.

THE BIG SIX


Angel/ EMI/ Virgin Classics
Capitol/ EMI Latin
Blue Note
Capitol
Grand Royal
Roll Wit It
Revolution
Barking Pumpkin
Liberty
Liberty Masters Series
Curb
Pangaea
Shock Therapy
I.R.S.
Tribal America
Sparrow
EMI Records Group
Chrysalis
EMI Pendulum
Ensign
Creation
SBK
Food
T.R.S.
Charisma
Point Blank
Virgin
Vernon Yard
CEMA
PGD
BMG
THE UNRELENTING QUEST FOR NEW MARKETS, MORE POWER,
ABCKO
A&M
Perspective
Tuff Break
Tabu
Megaforce
PLG
Atlas
Fiction
FFRR
Island
Go Discs/ London
Next Plateau
London
Victory
Polydor
Morgan Creek
PolyGram Classics & Jazz
Antilles
ECM
Decco/ London
London Classics
Deutsche Grammo-phon
Verve
Philips
Big Life
PWL
Fontana
THG Music
Motown
Mad Sounds
Mojazz
Mercury
Mercury Nashville
Wing
Frontier
Bantam Doubleday Audio
RCA
Musicmasters
Zoo
Scotti BrothersEntertainment
Critique
BMG Video
Miramar
Jive
Silvertone
Pavement Music
Restless
Praxis Int'l
Philadelphia Int'l
Reunion
RCA Nashville
Novus
Beggers Banquet
Rendezvous
Situation Two
Bluebird
BNA
Imago
BMG Ventures
Windham Hill
Windham Hill Jazz
Dancing Cat
High Street
Milan
BMG International
Karen Publishing
US Latin
Private Music
BMG Classics
Deutsche Harmonia
Eurodisc
Gang of Seven
Arista
LaFace
Dedicated
Rowdy
JRS
Arista Nashville
Zoom Express
Rabbit Ears
Rincon
Lightyear
Ode 2 Kids
Jim Henson
Discovery Music
Astor Music
Children's Group
BMG Kidz
Asylum
Elektra
Musician
Atlantic
Rhino
Atco
Big Beat
Eardrum
Es Paranza
EastWest
Kid Rhino
Tropical Storm
A*Vision
Atlantic Nashville
Delicious Vinyl
Mesa/ Blue Moon
Warner Bros.
4AD
American Recordings
Big Kids Entertain-ment
Big Screen Music
Capricorn
Cold Chillin'
Dark Horse
Duck
Earthbeat
Forceful
Giant
Luakabop
Maverick
Mechanic
Medicine
Metal Blade
Music for Little People
Opal

WHO OWNS WHO

- Geffen
  - DGC
- MCA/ Universal Video
- GRP
  - Stretch
  - Impulse
- Playboy Video
- MCA
  - Curb/ MCA
  - Decca
  - Future
  - Gasolene Alley
  - Impact
  - Margarita-ville
  - MCA Classics
  - MCA Nashville
  - Radio-active
  - Silas Records
  - S.O.U.L.
  - Uptown
- Rabbit Ears Video
- Pacific Arts Video
  - Mystic Fire
  - PBS Home Video
- Varese Sarabande
- Narada
  - Sona
  - Gala
- Pacific Arts Audio

CONTROL OVER WHAT YOU WILL HEAR

- Legacy
- CHAOS Record-ings
- Def Jam
- Red Baron Prod.
- DIW
- Earache
- RAL
- Columbia
- Sony 550 Music
- Crescent Moon
- Red Decibel
- Ruff House
- Thirsty Ear
- Vinyl Solution
- Essential Classics
- Epic Soundtrax
- Flavor Unit
- Immortal
- LV
- New Deal
- MJJ Records
- Epic
- INFINITY dIGITAL Masterworks
- Digital Masters
- Masterworks Dinner Classics
- Masterworks Portrait
- Passport
- Sony Broadway
- Great Performances
- Odyssey
- Vivarte
- OKeh
- One Little Indian
- Orpheus
- Sony Wonder
- Tribeca Music
- Word
- Columbia Special Products
- Immediate
- Monument
- SMSP/ Signature
- MGM Sound-tracks
- Risky Business
- Sony Classical
- Big Bag
- Club Play
- Capaca-bana
- Creation
- Dance Pro
- Discos Int'l
- Dragnet
- Nude
- Raw
- Cardenas & Fernandez
- Santa Fe
- Sony Latin
- Sony Tropical
- Rhythm King
- Ruben-stein
- Savannah
- Soho Square
- Sony Discos
- Squatt
- Sony Music Int'l
- Rock Pool
- TriStar Music
- WEA Latina
- Live Video
- Elektra
  - Erato
  - Mute
  - Select
  - Vinter-tainment
  - Hollywood
  - Nonesuch
  - Teldec
- Interscope
  - Luke
- Mammoth
  - Matador
- Modem
  - Ruthless
- Third Stone
- Qwest
  - Reprise
- Sire
  - Slash
- Tommy Boy
- Warner Reprise Video
  - Warner Bros. Nashville

AND MORE

EVERYTHING YOU'VE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAJOR LABELS

WHAT'S A MATA, DOR?

by Greg Lane

Despite the onslaught of the corporation, the independent and underground rock scene is becoming the strongest it has been in years. Despite the nauseating proliferation of major label-produced "alternative" music, the attempts at commercial co-optation of every idea and venue of legitimate resistance, and the frenzied buying-up of indie bands and labels, there is still honest, critical rock out there. In fact, corporate interest is a sure sign of a strong scene.

The six major record labels in this country are desperate for "alternative" credibility, and they've all bought a Pearl Jam or a Paw and created several faux-indie labels to try to get it. But after all that, and amidst the continuing assault, bands and labels interested in real opposition have started up and stayed on: it is not, after all, too hard to scratch the surface of a faux-indie to find the major label hidden underneath, and Pearl Jam's utter irrelevance is obvious.

But what if it weren't so obvious? What if some corporate suck figured out a way to get into bed with an established, critical independent label without anyone finding him there? The major would have privileged access to a scene that abhors them, and would have an excellent strategic position from which to screw that scene before anyone could figure it out. This is exactly the position in which Time-Warner Communications Corporation sits right now, with Matador Records in their back pocket. It is a uniquely disgusting and insidious intrusion.

Ask any of the people who support independent music, who work against the commercialization of rock, about the deal between the Atlantic Group (a Warner {WEA} company) and Matador Records. Better yet, ask Atlantic themselves. But there are no straight answers there. Asked if they own Matador, Atlantic starts with "not fully," and moves to "I can't explain things like that" before sending inquiries to Matador. At Matador, there is exactly one guy who can explain things: Gerard Cosloy. After wading through the sometimes apologetic, sometimes defensive explanation of his label's relationship with Atlantic, it comes out something like this:

When Matador became a successful indie label, with Pavement and Superchunk making the majors salivate, they started to get buy-out offers from virtually every major label. After the dust settled, Atlantic won the deal, and as of January 1, 1993, Matador "signed" with Atlantic.

"Atlantic and WEA finance every single thing we ever do," according to Cosloy, "everything under the sun... they pay our rent, our salaries, our overhead, our debts, everything." This includes production, manufacturing, marketing, and distribution of records. In return, Matador has to put out "a few" records each year with Atlantic; these are records carrying both the Matador and the Atlantic logos, but everything, production, marketing, distribution, etc., is done through the "WEA System:" it is an Atlantic record. Also, WEA/Atlantic profits from releases on Matador/Atlantic, and gets 50% of all profits on Matador's "independent" releases. "So if Chain Gang makes a profit," Cosloy confirms, "Atlantic gets half," even though Chain Gang is supposedly an independent Matador release.

So all the financing comes from WEA/Atlantic, and half the "indie" profits go back to WEA/Atlantic. If a band signed a similar deal with Atlantic, they would then be a major label band. But Matador is still considered an "independent label." That fact is very important to Atlantic. Indie credibility is exactly the commodity that they bought when they made a deal with Matador.

"Their `alternative' roster sucked," says Cosloy, "which helped make us a good deal for them. They could have hired five more A&R guys at five times the cost (to them) of the Matador deal, and they'd get fewer bands. Matador is a good A&R source for them because we carry a certain weight in the scene, and they can use the association with us to help them get bands."

That "weight" is the credibility that Matador has built since they started in 1989, due in no small part to Cosloy's frequent and biting criticisms of major labels, their bands, and the indie labels that "go to bed with the majors." Apparently, the deal has worked for Atlantic. Atlantic has since bought other indie labels, including Mammoth, and has fattened up its "alternative" roster. And how has Matador and its bands fared?

Cosloy insists that he has tried to structure the deal so that "the bands will be protected and [Matador] will be protected." That means "total creative control" for Matador bands. "Bands have almost complete veto right over whether or not their records come out as part of the WEA system." Here lies the key to Matador's defense against the sell-out accusation: the bands can decide whether to be on Atlantic or on Matador, and if they chose to remain on Matador, presumably they retain creative control over their records. Cosloy may sincerely believe that he has struck a deal that works for the bands and for the scene: "The last thing we want to do is to weaken the indie scene. We will still distribute records on an indie label, we will still do ten or twelve independent projects a year, and the bands have a lot of input. Atlantic has invested in Matador, and that means we can get records out on time, pay the bands on time, and keep records in print. Yeah, we are in bed with them and I guess we're just trying to figure out who's on top right now."

Atlantic, the argument goes, is unwittingly supporting the indie scene by financing Matador's independent releases. The Matador deal is a "weird experiment," says Cosloy, "we'd like to be the exception to the rule— a major label deal that doesn't screw the bands or contribute to the homogenization of honest music... but there is very little reason to believe that this deal will come off without a hitch, and in fact it hasn't."

It hasn't indeed. "We've made some big business mistakes... we were very naive about what it took to make major label records. A lot of the worst-case scenarios that

people told us about, records being lost in the WEA system and lost in the Atlantic family, and how you could end up spending $20.00 in promotion costs for each record you sold, all those things ended up being true." The first casualty was Moonshake, whose record on Matador/Atlantic bombed; any record unlikely to sell big quickly loses the support of the "WEA System." The Fall was also dropped; their next record will be "independently" released by Matador. Atlantic is quite content, however, to profit from Liz Phair and Pavement, both of whom thought that they were on an independent label.

With independent Matador projects, "the profit margin is so small that Atlantic will let us do whatever we want with it," says Cosloy. And if the profit margin becomes big? Liz Phair's next project will be on Matador/Atlantic. Once a Matador "indie" band is profitable, Atlantic, the company that pays for everything that band does, is in a great position to force them to sign.

A strange thing has happened along the way to Gerard Cosloy's criticisms of the music industry. The difference between Matador and Atlantic is largely "just sort of a cultural thing... I mean we are coming from a very different place on the map. The way we make records compared with the way they make records, ummm, the way we deal with bands, I mean, they aren't used to dealing with bands without managers and lawyers, they're not used to that kind of stuff. We're, you know, just like regular people, and they are emersed in the rock-biz culture, you know, our culture is... I don't know."

Huh? The culture of major labels is exactly business culture, where music is product and content depends on profitability. And Cosloy used to know this, but now he says the difference between independent and major record labels "is not a superficial difference, but whether we admit it or not, we are selling a product too, you know? We keep on reminding ourselves that the bands that we deal with are people, not property, but we are still selling shit, like Campbells soup on a shelf. I've spent years pointing fingers at people, but right now I try to sweat the big stuff, right now I try to worry about things like arguing whether we are going to put a record out through WEA/Atlantic. Hopefully, as time goes on, the Atlantic people will learn more about us and more about our bands and it won't seem so awkward and goofy."

In fact, it doesn't seem "awkward and goofy;" it seems corrupt and slimy. Cosloy has said, "we support and believe in the idea that people should stop being consumers and they should start making their own stuff, making tapes for their friends because the whole thing is so fucking caught up in commerce, the whole issue of buying and selling. The music is a product on a shelf and the whole thing is completely fucked up." And: "People want to support something that is successful, financially successful, commercially successful, but people have to get away from that mentality, because that's what fucks the whole thing up." What he means by "the whole thing" is the independent, underground rock scene. Fucking it up means corporatizing, homogenizing, commercializing the honest artists and music out there. True underground music does not and cannot support the corporations that they exist to resist.

Matador has, as Cosloy says "dealt the indie scene a low blow in the crotch." Every independent band wooed by Matador puts itself at Atlantic's mercy. It is easy to see why the Matador label is worth Atlantic's money: by promoting the idea that Matador is still independent and by co-opting that credibility and parlaying it into more control over the rock that is produced in this country, WEA/Atlantic has positioned itself a step closer to complete control over and oppression of the oppositional stance of legitimately underground rock.

But Gerard Cosloy says it best: "There are legitimate reasons not to buy records on major record labels. I mean, what do major labels spend their money on? What is their history? Their history is one of raping indie labels, destroying the indie scene just when it is getting strong."

The Matador/Atlantic deal isn't so unique after all: an indie label willingly got into bed with a major, knowing that majors have a history of rape.

Matador is fucked.

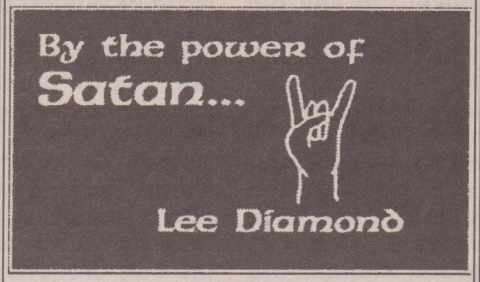
Here is an idea for a record insert. Any punk band that signs to a major label that still had an ounce of integrity and guts left could put something like this inside their releases:

This record is but the tip of the iceberg, just a small part of what's really going on in the international punk community. Our success has been built upon the foundation of thousands of people's work over the years, folks who have slaved away with little or no financial or artistic reward, putting out their own bands records, putting out fanzines, starting small independent labels and distributions.

If you don't know shit about any of this, it's no accident, as the major labels, MTV and other arms of the corporate mass media try to control exactly what it is that you can hear and know about. And in controlling your access to information, they have a much better chance in forming the boundaries of both your musical taste and your political/creative thinking.

If you'd like to find out more about the independent scene, its almost 20 year history in resisting governmental and corporate control by releasing music that doesn't conform to mainstream standards, and want to get opened up to a whole new world of music, ideas, and actions, then here's a list of some bands, zines and labels that will hopefully lead you to even more contacts, communication, friends and grassroots participation.

Having done this, the band could then list a ton of addresses on the back side for their listeners to check out. It should come as no great surprise that no band that's gone on to a major has done this. Is it because they have such big egos that they feel their success is based solely on their great talent, or is it because they are generally thoughtless, or is it because they were just using the underground in the first place. Guess we'll never know.



(Almost) Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Major Labels That They Never Told You

Most people live under the mistaken assumption that the only real way to make money off of music is to sign a contract with a major label. This is an attempt to prove how extraordinarily fucked that notion is. No one will put you in debt quicker than a major label.

The myths behind the supposed wisdom attached to signing with a major label are easy to dispel. Most of these myths are not even the deliberate work of the labels themselves, as much as they are the assumptions that people have of rock stars and music performers. In the artificial world of rock video and paparazi, everyone is rich. .

When one goes to an alternative concert, one is bound to see tour busses, groupies, roadies, techs, lighting engineers, sound engineers stage props, and endless supplies of guitars, basses, drum heads, sticks, strings, and what not. The automatic impression is that 1. the label is picking up the tab, and 2. the band is swimming in bucks.

Sorry, wrong answer, but thanks for playing!

Let's start at the very beginning. This is a treaty. It is a declaration of my commitment the underground, my sincere devotion to punk rock. Though I make it a rule to never say never, I am now proclaiming I will never sign to a major label. I have researched this area considerably and I believe that major labels are rip-off artist to a huge degree, that they cheapen art and artists, and for these reasons are an evil entity in his world, and I will not sign a deal with such a company.

Separating fact from fiction, it is important to investigate what the majors say or imply and compare it to what they mean. By no means is it the same thing. They will tell you what you want to hear, but that isn't what will necessarily take place.

A common belief with most people is that majors will stand behind the band, provide tour support, do promo work and so forth. All that is true, but the unspoken glitch is that it is paid for by the band, not the label.

A band on a major label is paid via royal ties. For every record sold, they get a certain percentage, or points. Usually, the royalties are in the neighborhood of 10 to 15 points. Huge stars like Michael Jackson, Madonna, or Guns and Roses can get near 30 points. There are numerous other factors involved and other opportunities for income. Some artists are on salary instead of points. This guarantees them an income if the record should do poorly and in that case is a pretty good deal, but if the record really takes off, it is a disaster.

The label usually takes in 70 to 90 points less production costs, advertising, shipping, and miscellaneous expenses. The average cost for a single CD (including CD, mastering, printing, packaging, inserts, jewel box and shrink wrapping) in a press of over 10,000 is around $1.50 per CD. For a larger release (over 100,000 pressed) the price drops considerably so that a single CD of say Nirvana's "In Utero" costs the label as little as 90 cents per unit, and in turn sells in a store for 12 to $16 plus tax.

Aside from production, advertising, and few miscellaneous things, the rest of the expenses including promo CDs to publications and radio stations, promo packaging, recording costs, artwork, producers, engineers, and technical assistance are the responsibility of the band. All the label does is act as coordinator for the band. They arrange the promos that get sent out and what goes in a promo package, but the band pays for it.

Usually, the method labels use to lure bands is to provide the band

with an initial advance. This is a huge sum of money advanced to the band from their expected royalties. It is not given to the band, it is loaned to the band. Thus, when you hear that Nirvana signed for a million bucks, or Urge Overkill signed for $250,000 or Helmet signed for $500,000, what that really means is that they were loaned that money from their cut of the royalties before the record is produced. This is where most bands get into real serious trouble.

Say that you are in a band. You've got the typical problems of a band, and maybe you're traveling to shows in a broken down van or a couple of cars. Suddenly, you have a cashiers check for $100,000 from the major label you just signed with. It seems about time to buy a real nice new Econoline XL or Clubwagon van. May be even a bus!

As long as all of that money is lying around, it might also be nice to take a little of that money to buy some new equipment (assuming that like most bands, you don't get full instrument endorsement) and of course there are personal expenses, needs, wants.

About one or two months after you've signed, it's time to take those songs into the studio. Time to get cracking. Time to get fucked.

It is around now that the band finds out its real expenses. The band, if they were well disciplined might have 1/2 to 3/4 of their advance money left. This money must cover the following expenses in most contracts: manager's cut, legal fees, recording (including: producer's fees, studio rental, engineer's fees, technical assistance, equipment rental, tape, mastering, etc.), video expenses (even though bands may be contractually obligated by the label to do one or more videos, the band still picks up the tab, including: cameras, crew, pre-production costs, post production costs, props, stage, director's fee and so forth), album artwork, band photos, promo shots, promo material for tours, record stores, radio stations, clubs, and industry people, all tour expenses, merchandise expenses, and end less miscellaneous expenses.

This is the responsibility of the band. Yes, the band. Obviously, as bands rise in popularity, they inevitably make more money (or get less in debt) and when a band gets huge (filling arenas), they can renegotiate contracts and force the label to pick up recording costs, video shoots, etc. That's great for them, but not so wonderful for the average "alternative" band.

If you're thinking you can avoid all of this by signing a better contract, forget it. Not only is the opportunity for improvement on the basic contract limited, it is also highly unlikely. Consider that bands like Superchunk, Jesus Lizard, Jawbreaker, Liz Phair, Tar, and Fugazi are about as large as one can get in the underground, and they would not get everything they want on a major label contract (assuming they would even want one), what makes you think that you and your dinky little band can do better?

No person or band in the industry has a contract that allows them complete artistic control. NO ONE. Major labels must protect their corporate interests, so if an artist was about to do something that might jeopardize the label's standing with another industry, corporation, politician, etc., they must be able to take action. They have full veto power over any aspect of an artist's work.

Nirvana was refused permission to release "In Utero" with the production they wanted. Numerous other bands have had to cut song length, remove songs from records, change lyrics, alter album covers, or do other things that compromised their personal integrity. Even in videos, the label has full approval of the final product even though they did not pay for its production.

A major label contract averages over 10 pages. This is a contract created by dozens of high priced lawyers which is designed to make the label as much money as possible, which in turn means giving as little as they can to the band. The average person presented with such contract would be utterly lost. It would be impossible for the layman to understand over 10 pages of cross-referenced, complex legal jargon. It is safe to assume that the average band would be clueless, and in serious potential danger if they signed such a contract without a lawyer.

So, the band hires a lawyer. Let's say it's a cheap lawyer and he or she only gets about $5 an hour. How long would it take the lawyer to go over a hundred pages carefully? Let's underestimate and say 10 hours. So in 10 hours, the lawyer finds the contract is not OK. That just cost the band $500.

On the other hand, maybe the lawyer say that the contract seems good and the band believes him. It is inconceivable that in a few hour a single low budget lawyer is going to be able to see every potential liability, responsibility, an loophole present in a contract perfected over years by some of the best lawyers in the country

There are further technicalities, techniques and methods used by the major labels to play you like a sucker. A&R reps (Artist and Repertoire) are a valuable tool in the industry. These are folks just like you. They're young, they're hip, they know the bands you know, they dress like you, they talk like you. These folks are the buffer elite of the music industry.

A&R reps usually contact a band after reading about them in *CMJ*, *Spin*, *Rolling Stone* or MRR. (If you think that the majors don't keep an eye on the underground right at the source then you are extraordinarily naive.) Poobah got over a dozen letters and calls from major labels due to a single paragraph about us in the *CMJ*.

When a label is interested in a band, a scout might come to check out one of their shows. If they are REALLY interested, the label will fly down to discuss stuff or fly the band to Los Angeles or New York to talk. The band will the talk to one of the rebellious young A&R reps who will convince the band what a great deal they are going to get.

The band often feels at this point that life couldn't be better. The A&R rep was so cool! He/she wasn't at all like a typical industry type! He/she is on our side!

During this meeting, the band might sign an innocent looking letter of intent or "deal memo" which states that the band and the label

will come to some kind of contractual agreement at some point. This letter is a binding contract. It puts the band in a legal outhouse.

Basically, the band will be forced to sign contract with that label, buy out of the agreement, or break up. After signing this letter of intent, all intellectual and musical ideas of the band belong to the label. They can't even release their own material by themselves. The deal memo does not expire, and the label has all the time and all of the leverage. You can pretty well guess who is left holding the shitty side of the toilet paper.

Major labels hold all the cards in terms of distribution and connections. It appears that major labels can help you so much because they act as arrangers. Most of the things that major labels do for their bands is get them in the door. Sure, major labels will give you tour support, promo posters, and so forth, but remember that it is on YOUR tab, just like an independent.

The truth of the matter is that a band who wants to get a fair shake and make some money can only do this on an independent label. On a large independent label, you can still have the label put buttloads of promo out, help you with your bookings, and all sorts of shit, and just like with the majors, you pay for it. The difference is that you also have control over where it goes, and when it stops. On a major label, you pick up the tab, but they make the decisions.

Independent labels as a general rule are also not interested in holding the band in some type of legal vice. An independent will let you sing about what you want to sing about. They aren't going to tell you that you must put a lime warning sticker on your CD, or that the cover is too graphic, that the lyrics are too anti-establishment, that the third song on the CD sucks so it's coming off, that you have to go to Camelot Music to do a promo, that you better have that video at their offices by next week, that you can't use a certain producer, that you have to tour with Therapy? whether you like it or not, or that you better get on your knees and start sucking.

With an independent, obviously the audience is smaller, thanks to the major label's chokehold on distribution, however the percentage that you make back off of what is sold is much larger. Independent labels rely on the underground to sell their records. If an independent were to fuck over a band, the band will damage their reputation with the underground and the label will lose their audience. For this reason, it is in their own best interest to not do such a thing

Each band from the punk scene that signs to a major label has sold us out. When a band on an indie sells 50,000 copies of their album, it is good for everyone in the scene. It opens the distribution doors, it strengthens the label, and it puts more people in touch with the underground *without compromising*! When a band reaches this point, they are probably making more money on the independent then they would on a major label anyway.

When a band signs to a major label, they are abandoning the people that got them to where they are now. Signing to a major hurts the entire indie scene, not just the individual label that they were on. The band is proclaiming that their underground base of fans that bought their records, went to their shows, and got them to where they are now, were OK, but they got a better offer. This sounds a lot like dumping your girlfriend or boyfriend because a better looking one came along.

Another issue which really gets me foaming at the mouth is the Columbus-esque manner in which the major labels have acted as if they have created or discovered this "brand new" form of music. Needless to say, punk has been around in some form for a long fucking time. It was about 1979 when the majors declared it to be dead and it kept going without them, and thrived in spite of their best efforts to ignore and destroy.

Now, MTV, *Spin*, *Rolling Stone*, and so forth act as if they discovered these bands playing in their garage. People without a fucking clue about where everything came from think that THEY are the underground. If you read an article in one of those big-time music magazines, you can see endless homage paid to bands like Minor Threat, Black Flag, Mission of Burma, Halo Of Flies, Big Black and a million other bands that they ignored while they were in existence. The impression is that the labels and MTV and magazines and so forth are rebellious, anti-establishment, revolutionaries rejecting pop culture, even though *they* are pop culture.

There are so many more reasons why this situation is so fucked, but going into all of them would take a billion years and make this already wordy diatribe dangerously similar in length to a Russian novel. I want to thank Steve Albini for his article in *The Baffler* #5--reprinted in this issue further on--which inspired me (along with other research and mental fits over this topic) to write this article. If you want a copy of this publication please send $5 to The Baffler, PO Box 378293, Chicago, IL 60637. It is truly an excellent read.

I always love hearing comments and such, be they positive or negative, on what I have to say. I would be particularly interested in additional insight into this particular debate, so feel free to write or call me. 34 W. Washington #1, Athens, OH 45701 (614)593-5092. Thanks.

So this guy gets involved with punk music, and he gets a band together and they start getting bigger and bigger, and soon they are a big independent act. And finally they sign to a huge record corporation and their record spends some time as the number one album in the nation. In the end he gets access to more money then he could ever imagine, and there is no limit to all the drugs and women he can have, only he is married and life is won-

derful, but this guy's name is Kurt Cobain and he turns a shotgun to his head and blows his brains all over the wall. I get up on a Saturday morning and I read about it in the paper, and some record executive says something like, "This is a terribly sad day for the music industry." And at the end of the article it talks about his wife, Courtney Love, and it mentions that she is unavailable for comment because she is being consoled by her attorney.

And there it is right in front of me. I've been trying to figure out what I could possibly say about major labels that isn't already being said by countless other people who consider themselves articulate. The truth is that this article in the fucking *Los Angeles Times* says it all. These people have everything. They have all the money, all the fame, all the success. They live the rock'n'roll fantasy every fucking day of their lives. But the fantasy is a cyanide pill just waiting to kill. Money and fame and power and success cannot buy you happiness. Rich people kill themselves because they are lonely and their lives suck. If wealth could buy you happiness, the wealthy people would be happy, but it can't, and they're not. Switzerland, for example, is one of the most affluent countries, and it has one of the highest standards of living, and, correspondingly, it has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. There is a connection between suicide, loneliness and wealth. When you go to your attorney for condolence after your husband has just blown his face all over your new house, then you know you are truly alone.

I believe that it is possible to live a life worth living. But in order to achieve that life you have to have self-respect, friendship, and pride in what you do. The hardcore punk that I know and love won't make you rich, and it won't make you famous, but it will teach you about self-respect and integrity, and it will introduce you to people that you will be able to call friends, and it will give you a hobby or a talent or an activity that you can control and take pride in. I'm not trying to say that Kurt's death was decided by the success of his band, but I have to wonder what life would be like when every young girl wants to suck your dick, and every suit'n'tie wants to ream you for a wad of cash, and every kid you meet wants to use you as a key to the castle of rock'n'roll.

Punk rock isn't about using people for selfish motives. Punk rock is about doing things you love. Punk rock is about getting in a band, and traveling around the country and meeting new people and building foundations and knowing that these new friends aren't after your money or your fame or your image. Punk rock is about people. And punk rock is about trying to get away from the bullshit of a music industry based on the maximization of profit at any cost When that poor fuck said that it was a sad day for the record industry, all I could think of was the fact that no one in the industry really gave a shit about this so-called "icon" and ultimately the only ones that were probably sad were the accountants and bankers that would miss out on all the loot that Kurt's band would have brought in with their future releases. Our society is so fucking warped and twisted. We place more value on money and things and fame then we do on self-respect, friendship and pride in quality work. Money has no value in the real world where life and death are determined. The real world is that place where we have to interact with the rest of our species. The real world can be a lonely place. It can be the sort of place where no one cares if you live or die, and sometimes you no longer care. Money and fame and pretty things can't appease that loneliness

When bands sign to major labels, they always say it is for "wider distribution" and they wave the flag of reaching new audiences, but that is a bunch of crap. The real reasons are the same ones that most of our parents use when they take jobs they don't like or work longer hours than they want to, and the reasoning is just the same when we change our clothes to get better paying jobs and hold our tongue in fear of angering our boss and endangering our job Everyone has to do what they have to do, and if you decide to sell your band to some major label for a wad of cash and that "wider distribution" you are so eager to get, then go right ahead. Just remember that if you sell your self-respect, if you find that you can't tell your friends from the leeches, and if you lose the pride you have in what you do, then you are no different than the kids you grew up with whose dreams consisted of well paying jobs in tall shiny offices, a house with a two car garage, a couple of cars, a white picket fence, membership in the local fitness club, a spouse, a couple of kids, and a whole lot of cash to buy pretty things.

In the twelve years that I have been listening to this music we call punk, I have learned a lot about self-respect. I learned to appreciate myself, and how to do things for myself. I learned what it meant to bridge the distance between spectator and participant. I learned that my opinions had value, and how to think for myself. And I learned how to put on shows, to be in a band, to put out 'zines, to start a record label, and to do anything I want. I believe in myself. Punk rock taught me that.

And in these twelve years I have met many people. Some of these people have become my good friends, my closest lovers, and ultimately some of them became my enemies. These people took me for who I was. It wasn't about fame, or fortune, or any of the illusions that money can create. My friendships have been about people and who we are as people. I have always been able to see the difference between a friend and leech. That line always remains clear. In the punk community there is a rough sort of equality. There isn't much hero worship and there isn't too much ass licking. For the most part people either like you or hate you, and they don't lie about it or try to manipulate you for their own benefit. I want to be liked for who I am, not for what I can give you.

And, finally, over the course of all these years I learned what it meant to be proud of what I do. I take pride in my record label, the way I go about distributing the stuff I sell, and the way treat people. I am proud of the 'zines I do and the

words I have written, and I am proud of what it all stands for. I enjoy getting up in the morning to go to "work." Work isn't a place where I serve my time, and punch the clock waiting for the weekend. I love what I do. It isn't work. It is a craft and an activity to be enjoyed. Right now I work at Ebullition full time, but when I worked full time as a janitor I often got through the day looking forward to the mail that would be waiting at home and the orders to be filled. Having a band and taking pride in that band is no different. It feels good to have something of our own, something that you can put all your energy into. You take pride in it because it belongs to you and you put your everything into it to make it the best thing you possible can; not because you want to get a pot of gold but because you love doing it.

That's punk to me. That's life to me. If major labels start offering self-respect, solid friendships, pride in something well done, along with a sense of integrity and independence, then I say go for it. If that was the case, I would sell Ebullition to any major that would take it, but all I see them offering is a whole lot of shit. I don't want their money, their fame, or their false kiss ass society of parasites pretending to be my friends. Those things are worthless in my world, and I don't want to end up with a noose around my neck, or some poison in my body, or a needle in my arm, or the barrel of a shotgun in my mouth.

As I'm sure the world knows by now, Kurt Cobain shot himself in the head a week ago. Despite all the lame sell-out shit that Nirvana did, I liked their music. There, I've said it: I enjoyed listening to Nirvana. Granted, their CDs only spent limited amount of time in my player, but I do own them. And I will admit that I was genuinely upset that he did it.

I don't think that his self-styled demise should be applauded or laughed at. It's pathetic. Some could say that it is proof of what harm comes from selling your soul to the highest bidder. I think that anytime you take something that is precious to you and commodify it, it'll eventually come back to hurt you. Whatever the case, it's always sad when a person hates life so badly they opt for death. And to leave a little girl behind is probably the worst tragedy.

If people want to find a villain in this whole mess, look to the mass media's portrayal of him. "John Lennon", "a voice of a lost generation", (or my favorite) "creator of the sound and look called 'grunge'" have all been used to describe him . Maybe I'm confused but didn't he off himself, in part to finally escape this type of martyrdom he apparently kept trying to shake while alive? Unfortunately, by sticking that shotgun in his mouth, he created a media monster. And I'm guilty of it, too. I'm trying to stop thinking about it, as I'm sure most of you are, too. But I keep thinking that River Phoenix and he are going to be the James Dean and Jimi Hendrix of our generation. We are going to have to hear about this incident for the rest of our lives . Shrines and rabid fans are going to appear out of the woodwork, and I'll guarantee that the garage over which he did the dirty deed is going to be a favorite hangout spot of the "true fans" of Kurt Cobain, just like the room where Nancy Spungen died.

When River Phoenix died I was a bit surprised, but I really wasn't very upset. He was an actor, and I had never read any interviews with him or come close to understanding or feeling an affinity to him. He was doing some cool, just outside-the-mainstream stuff that I liked, but I had no clue as to who he was as a human being. But it was somewhat different with Nirvana. I owned *Bleach*, followed their music, liked his bizarre lyrics as well as his voice. Even though I tried not to, I loved "Smells Like Teen Spirit." (Punk confession #3). I thought it was a riot that America was singing along to a song that no one, including me, knew what the fuck the words meant. Not since James Brown had radio listening types claimed a love for something so unintelligible.

When I saw him and his bandmates on the cover of *Rolling Stone* with a t-shirt that said 'Corporate Rock Sucks', I instantly thought of a girl who tries to fight and is called spunky and told "you're so cute when your mad", instead of being taken seriously. I'm not denying that he couldn't expect to be taken seriously after signing to DGC, but I'm not sure that inherent contradiction reached him. But we can be sure of what did reach him; money, alienation, asshole/thick necked crowds, more money, heroin, manipulation, and more money.

I could easily turn this into a fable with a moral at the end, but I think everyone knows the underlying theme. It's too painfully clear that fame and fortune all come at a price. Maybe this is a beacon or warning sign for those bands who followed or are in the process of following the road to riches Nirvana did. I wonder what answer the surviving members of Nirvana would give to that question? Unfortunately, the price for all that power is shared with all those around who claim to care. Just ask all those Kurt left behind. In fact, I wonder how they will tell Francis Beene?...

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Of course by the time you read this it will be May, but I'm writing this more than a month earlier, in the midst of a trip to Michigan, Ohio Indiana, and Illinois, the kind of places where it's only too easy to

understand just how cruel April can be.

More than one observer has noted that the torment of an unfulfilled promise is infinitely worse than abject surrender in the face of clearly hopeless causes. That's something midwesterners, who every year see spring dangling enticingly before their winter-weary eyes, only to see it snatched away and buried beneath yet another late-season snowstorm, can relate to in a way we pampered Californians will always find it hard to grasp.

But there's also a beauty, as profound as it is elusive, to be seen in the still brown field beneath which one can barely detect the firs' green shoots of another year's renewal, just as one can find a muted eloquence in the deserted back streets of the rust belt's decaying cities where only a handful of artists and fanatics find anything resembling hope or a future.

It's a beauty that I'm especially attuned to. Though it's been twenty-five years since I left my native midwest, there's something in the drabness, the flatness, the matter-of-factness, that will always resonate in my soul. Even the horrid despicable, abominable climate that midwesterners inexplicably endure has its charms for me - in great moderation, of course. When an unexpected snowstorm brought an abrupt halt to April's first genuine warm spell, I was practically dancing down the streets with excitement, while my friend Beth, who had just lived through one of the worst Michigan winters in memory, looked as though she were pondering whether to strangle, bludgeon, or shoot me.

Anyway, I've been having a splendid time in these unlikely vacation destinations - seriously, do you know anyone who would deliberately travel to Ohio in search of amusement? - and am barely, if at all, in the mood, to engage in yet another discussion of punk ethics and economics. But it's an important subject, no doubt, and on many minds these days, so let's give it on more shot:

Is there anything still to be said on the subject of major labels? As I search my thoughts for something original on the subject, I can't help thinking of the preacher who, every Sunday, year in and year out, has to come up with new ways to denounce Satan. Uh, dude, he's like really bad, and he totally harshes your soul, OK?

Unlike many people in the punk scene, I can't get that exercised about major label influences. For me, it's very simple: if you don't like a record company, don't buy their records. If you're mad at a band for signing to a record company you don't like, don't buy their records either. End of story; if everyone simply followed that principle, none of this brouhaha would be happening.

I myself went through a period of about ten years where I didn't buy anything released on a major label except for a few really old things like Hank Williams and Frank Sinatra, who I didn't think would be coming out on DIY labels anytime soon. In the last couple years I've relaxed my standards considerably, or maybe another way of saying it is that I've broadened considerably the sorts of music I'll listen to.

As wonderful and exciting as it was to be fully immersed in punk and hardcore for all that time, I'm kind of resentful toward myself for being so narrow-minded that I missed out on a lot of other great music that was being made during the 1980s. Some, though not most of it, was on major labels. The way things are going these days, I suppose many of you are going to be questioning your assumptions as one after another of your favorite bands signs on the dotted line.

Whether they're on a major or an indie, it's my opinion that with few exceptions, bands usually do their best work on their first couple albums, and then steadily go downhill in almost direct proportion to how popular they're becoming. I first noticed that about my favorite bands way back in the 60s, and things haven't changed much. I think it has something to do with the way popularity and financial success isolates the band from the audience who originally gave them much of their inspiration.

I've seen the same principle at work in all the arts: whether with authors or movie directors or TV writers, once they hit on a formula for success, they're afraid to tamper with it, and the more successful they become, the more bloated, self-important, and removed from reality their art becomes. Witness the fabulously successful rock bands who can't come up with anything to write about except how lonely it is at the top or how tough it is being on the road promoting their latest album.

One other thought I'd like to share about major labels vs. independents: Ever since Green Day went to Warner Brothers, I've heard a lot of opinions, both for and against that decision. But many if not most of those opinions have been based on misinformation. The principal misconception is that Green Day's move was based mainly on money.

Again and again I hear people defend them by saying, "Why should they have to struggle and starve just for the sake of staying on an independent label?" and people attack them by saying, "All they care about is money, that's why they went to Warner Brothers."

No doubt money was a factor in their decision, but, as I and others have often tried to point out, major vs. indie is not a simple equation of big money vs. little or no money. Most bands who sign to majors never see any money except (if they get one) their initial advance. Out of the handful of bands who do make money on a major label, even fewer make any truly significant amounts.

Those few, of course, become fabulously rich, just like the handful of athletes or movie stars who make it to the big time. And it's from there that most misconceptions about being on a major label arise. But let me puncture some of your preconceived notions with a couple facts.

One of the guys from Green Day stopped by last week while on a break from their tour an filled me in on how things were going. As of then, their major label record had shipped 140,000 copies to stores and actually sold 60,000. So already the record had outsold both of their releases on Lookout, which have

each sold about 55,000.

Want to know how much money they'd made on the Warner Brothers record? Nothing. It still hadn't sold enough to cover its initial costs. On the Lookout records? Well, it's not my place to reveal personal financial information, but let's just say it's been enough for the band to live on for the past couple years.

Another interesting major label fact: the tour that Green Day was on had been fabulously successful. Nearly every show sold out, a thousand or more fans at each one. And how much did Green Day make on tour? Less than nothing. In fact they lost money, a lot of it. Not because anything went wrong; in fact they expected to lose money going into it. That's the way Warner Brothers does things: tours are seen more as way of promoting the record. By contrast, on their last couple of independent tours, playing less shows and to smaller audiences, Green Day made a lot of money.

By now you're probably asking what the point is? If being on a major label is so awful, why are so many bands anxious to do it? Are they all just plain dumb?

No, of course not, and especially not in the case of Green Day. You may not agree with their decision, you may even hate them, but they're not dummies. Unlike most bands who go to a major label, in the long run Green Day will probably make a great deal of money and, at least at the rate they're going, become fabulously successful.

But they're the exception to the rule rather large exception. And what's more, they're sufficiently talented that they would have be come fabulously successful even if they'd stayed on an indie label, though their success wouldn't have come so fast and might not have been quite so fabulous.

For example, we don't have the ability to get them on MTV or onto all the commercial radio stations or into every record store in the land. Depending on your own beliefs, that might be an advantage or a drawback. But undoubtedly a large factor in Green Day's choosing the path they did was the fact that they wanted those things. Fame is a powerful drug, and I don't think it's a wholly bad one.

Like any powerful drug, it needs to be handled very carefully, and whether Green Day use it wisely or foolishly is up to them now. Which brings me back to my original point, and its obvious corollary: if you don't like what Green Day or Jawbox or Samiam or Shudder to Think or god knows who else signed this month are doing, don't buy their major label records and stop worrying about them. They're big boys and girls and can take care of themselves. The only place you have in the decision making process is whether or not you want to go along with it

And if you don't, the logical conclusion is to go out and do something better of your own. If you can't sing or play an instrument, start a label, or a zine, or figure out some other way of insuring that the music you truly believe in reaches the ears of those it was intended to reach. If you're just going to sit there whining about how so-and-so sold out, pretty soon nobody is going to be listening.

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As of 3:08 PM CDT 4.8.94, the Rip Offs are my favorite band. I know this seems uncharacteristically giddy, but i'm trying not to be so GOSH dang negative this month. I mean, my god, i belittled Greg Shaw's fucking GRAPHIC DESIGN. Is that BITCHY or what? I should be on all fours orally retrieving Shaw toejam with my tongue for ALLOWING me sonic congress with hyperclassic Stiv Bators material via his BOMP! record label (actually, you should be helping me. You take the left foot, i'll take the right); instead belittle the guy's shaky artistic skills (which he's probly real sensitive about), immediately following which the guy puts me to shame with the over art for "L.A. L.A.," the Bators outtakes/rarities disc (which i can't really recommend to anyone other than Night Of The Living Stiv types such as myself [even though Stiv covers Slade's boffo "Gudbuy T'Jane" on it] [which is misspelled the wrong way on the track listings i'll have you know!]—i mean, how many "alternate versions" of this stuff can a fella REALLY be expected to consume, especially when the only discernible difference between "versions" is a conspicuous lack of fidelity? [GOD DAMMIT, here i go being snide again. I warned myself— further continuation of the snottiness thing will land me an entire weekend's worth of watching Barney flicks as penance]). Luckily, BOMP!'s 10" reissue of Stiv's "Disconnected" LP—which EVERYBODY needs in one form or another (looking at the top right corner of the back cover, i see that i own #4043 out of a limited edition of 0...what label is this on? Planet Pimp??)- has even lamer graphic design than the CD version which set me howling last ish, thus i feel somewhat vindicated—though not particularly justified—in my wounded aesthete hissy fit. Jesus, what a PERTURBING selection of colors. Whoops, Barney time! I also cut down the Humpers liner notes—boy, that was swift. I mean, not that the liner notes in question don't SUCK or anything, but i probly coulda found different things to smart off about. NOW i'll probably run into to them one day and begin to gush about how ^fucking BRILLIANT their Space-Age-As-Retro packaging (devised as Mr. "Courtship Of" Eddie Flowers, i believe) on their ball-busting "Journey To The Center Of Your Wallet" LP is, and they'll see my face and kick my ass into outer space as mandated by the Humper Room Code Of Ethics. As of 3:15 PM CDT 4.8.94, the Humpers stomp the Lazy Cowgirls like red-headed stepchildren or was that "bald-headed stepchildren?). As of 3:16 PM CDT, a rather unsettling thought has occurred to me: is anybody who reads this (assuming for the sake of argument it actually gets read, which is kinda hard to believe) actually familiar with the records i'm making reference to, or

am i just completely off in my own little world? Yeesh, i've just been informed that Kurt Kookie" Cobain has kicked his own bucket—but in a more interesting development, did you know that both the Humpers and the Cockney Rejects ended their third albums (uh, there IS really a Yugoslavian Humpers album, isn't here?) with a cover of "Motorhead" (originally done by, uh, Motorhead, strangely enough)? What exactly should i do here? Write some snide eulogy for the guy or use the time to inform people that the CD reissue of the Real Kids album is exactly 35 minutes long, which makes it precisely one second shorter than both the Vibrators "Pure Mania" CD and the Beatles "Revolver" CD? What's stupider? Are they both stupid? Is there a market for this kinda stuff? How are my numbers? What kinda market share am i pulling in? Could i get a better time slot? Yeah, i agree who the fuck cares (i mean, you KNOW there was some high-ranking Geffen exec over at Cobain's house this morning going "Well, y'know—"In Utero" really isn't moving like we thought it would, sales need a little pick-me-up... have you been feeling depressed at all lately? Have you ever considered buying a handgun? Oh, look, is that your wife's face, or did her neck throw up. Hey, did you ever play this Judas Priest album backwards?") ...many of you have asked what the deal is with the time/date shit (actually, no one has inquired—i just say things like that to radiate an aura of false interest). That should be obvious: at the very core of all worthy rock journalism lies expression of the following holy mantra: I AM COOLER THAN YOU. There are a variety of ways to insinuate this point, but the most dependable and time-honored method is to simply state that you were "into" something hep (or, conversely, "not into" something yucky before every other joe on the planet got into or out of it (hey, it always works for me!) Buuuuuttt... stories get old and data gets fudged and dates have a way of sliding inexplicably backwards through the time stream as life drags on, so therefore, GOD DAMMIT, when i officially fuckin' declare something, I WANT IT PROPERLY ANNOTATED. In fifteen years there's gonna be all these crappy authorized biographies of the Rip Offs published by St. Martin's Press floating about, and in every last one of 'em I'M gonna come off looking like the coolest motherfucker on the face of Planet X because I WAS THE FIRST PERSON TO PUBLICLY DECLARE THEM MY FAVORITE BAND, AND I WILL HAVE WITNESSES GALORE TO BACK ME UP. Tragic things happen if you have no corroborating evidence, like in the peculiar case of the Shitbirds (the band with the John Kricfalusi record art and the Fastbacks-cum-Chipmunks vocal delivery): Something like eight years ago, i used to constantly sing the jingle from the "Icebird" sno-cone machine commercial that was on Saturday morning TV about fourteen times an hour in the 70's to myself as i mopped stairwells. I tried to persuade the band i was in to learn it, but their moms must've made them play outside too much on Saturdays cuz none of 'em claimed to remember it. The better part of a decade later, the fricking Shitbirds re-do it as "Scheissebird" (in the immortal parlance of Arnold from Happy Days: "mmm BA HA HA! ! !"), and i'm left to just sit around fruitlessly wheezing about how i had the idea eight years ago and it should be ME, ME, ME reaping the bountiful harvest of fame & glory that will no doubt be visited upon the Birds-O-Shit for their efforts. Bah! Never again will my claim be so jumped! As of 3:38 PM CD 4.8.94, any conviction of extreme brilliance i might wind up in possession of—be it regarding avian-shaped sno-cone makers or any other contraptions of great importance—will be duly ascribed to ME, ME, ME, and registered with TO-THE-MINUTE accuracy, because i understand how this Hundredth Monkey shit works and i know that a day or two after i have some heartstopping flash of insight, you'll probably luck into it too via your dingy remaining connections to the cosmic unconscious. The FUCK you will, pal! Yeah, well, like i said, the Rip Offs are my favorite band and Rip Off Records is my favorite label—which brings me to the rather dodgy subject of major labels in the punk scene, which i believe i was asked to touch upon in between insults. In a nutshell: I dig it. Major label interest in the punk scene is COOL, because, in some twisted little Reaganomical trickle-down theory gone right, the presence of major labels means MONEY in the bank for me (uh, INDIRECTLY of course. I have turned down ALL major label offers for the services of Boris The Sprinkler on accounta i don't wanna get obscenely rich and famous and then get all depressed over it and shoot myself). Fuck, the kids that digs these major label new wave bands like Nirvana are fucking DOPES and DUPES, plus they got money, and I WANT IT! Bands used t sell t-shirts for five bucks, now you can ask eight or nine or twelve and these kids won't bat a fucking eyelash! You used to be able to go see five or so local bands for two or three dollars, now it's five or six bucks and there's MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER paying to get it! The bands i used to be in would walk away from local shows with maybe ten or twenty clams to split between us—now i walk away from gig with bulges in BOTH my pockets. Somehow, I attribute this windfall profiteering to the presence of the majors—separating the rubes from their rubles has been a comparative cakewalk since they stuck their delicately powdered schnozzes into the scene. Okay, there IS the gripe about how most—well, no, actually ALL—of the patrons sicced upon the scene by dint of major label new wave acts are, essentially, dildos who will contaminate our happy enclave with their brutish outsider ways. Well, SURE. I'll yield you that—but there's never really gonna be enough hipsters to go around anyway. Jeezus Christ, i'm 28 years old, i been into punk rock for a million years—it is NOT real hard for me to walk into a show and figure out with a substantial amount of accuracy who the dildos are and aren't, and i'd imagine you could say the same for your-

self. We can work AROUND these people. We NEED them. They might conceivably buy a T-SHIRT or something, and they're generally quite tractable folks. We can bend them to our will, divest them from their cash, and build the scene on a foundation of their bleaching bones. PUNK! Yet, even with all these direct bennies to the scene resulting from major label incursions onto our turf, some people STILL refuse to purchase their product. Not me, man! I don't give two hoots and a handjob whether the slabs beckoning to me at the record store on Friday night were pressed by two high school kids or by fricking Bank Of America; if it rocks I'LL BUY IT. To espouse any other position is complete and utter BETRAYAL of all that is rockin'; it is punk rock treason of the highest order. Shit, i rarely buy anything on major label anyway, but THAT'S NOT THE POINT. The point is that i would GLADLY buy major label releases IF I COULD FIND ANY THAT WERE ANY GOOD, and deal with the ancillary crap like "Oh, Reverend Norb, how could you buy that new 'Mewling Puke-Pukes' album on Corp Tone when the label's parent company supplies the hand soap for a chemical weapons factory in Belize?" later. And why shouldn't i? What the fuck's it to ME if the new Green Day album is on Reprise or Lookout? Like i give a fuck! Like somehow the new Bad Religion album sucked LESS when it was on Epitaph and not Atlantic? Like there's some HUGE world of difference between the two? Sure, majors are significantly lamer than indie labels—but as far as i'm concerned, ANY LABEL THAT'S BIGGER THAN ONE GUY SITTING IN AN APARTMENT WITH A COUPLE CARTONS OF RECORDS ON THE FLOOR IS, ESSENTIALLY, A CORPORATE SATAN ANYWAY. Independent labels are just smaller, that's about it. Talk to someone who works for a major. Now talk to someone who works for an indie. Unless you're particularly hot shit at the moment, you're probably still gonna get that "don't bother attempting to impress me, i'm a fashionably jaded music industry professional" vibe from th' both of 'em. It's just like trying to deal with fucking clubowners— the ones who run the divey little shitholes aren't any nicer or more humble than the guys who book the really big places (except for Wes at Quarters Rock Palace in Milwaukee [capacity 50]—Wes rules!); hell, usually they're even BIGGER dicks, probably cause they ain't got a decent place to shit when they come to work. I just don't see a quantum leap of difference between majors and independents—they both seem to espouse the same agenda, the majors just have a more advanced case of it. Now, you get down to the Rip Off Records level, and you KNOW the only motivation behind their product is "Rip Off Records CEO Greg Lowery making records that Rip Off Records CEO Greg Lowery would himself want to find in a record store," which is, hands down, THE WAY TO BE. You KNOW that the guy gets up in the morning, sits up on the edge of his unmade bed in his underwear and sunglasses, picks up one of his label's records from a cardboard box on the floor, stares at it a while and goes "Fuck, man! These records are soooooooo cool!", and that is beautiful. You KNOW that he's happiest about MAKING the record, not selling it (although i'm sure he occasionally hasta scratch his punk rock head and muse aloud over why squares would rather be sitting around the basement listening to NOFX when they could be spinning the new Spoiled Brats 45 instead) (yeah, okay, sure—i'll CEDE ya the point that, yes, NOFX have improved quite a bit over the last million years—but still, not titling their last record "So What If We're On Epitaph" shows a staggering lack of vision) (i think their next one should be called "So What If We're On Matador," regardless of what label it's actually on). Itty bitty labels like that are a labor of love (or hate, or whatever); majors and larger indies are both businesses—so what's the diff? Besides, once some daffy fuck at a major label sticks you on a freebie list, you're on for ages. I haven't put out a zine in four years; even when i did i never sent copies to major labels asking for promos—yet somehow i still get crap from all those outfits. A very small fraction i keep—the rest gets parlayed into cash, which is why they gotta make sure to send me my David Lee Roth and Ronnie James Dio albums on CD (uh, i have no cassette player! Yeah!) (worse yet, half the shit they send me on cassette i can't get a fucking nickel for—which leads me to believe, in my heart of hearts, that major labels could do no worse signing bands by picking names out of a hat). By virtue of me being on the Reprise promo list, i was spared the indignity of having to actually pay for the new Green Day record—so think about it: When Green Day was on an independent label, i had to buy their records. After they signed to a major, i got their records for free. OH, GEEZ, PLEASE, NO, STOP, FREE RECORDS, I CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE OF THIS MAJOR LABEL OUTRAGE!!! Fuck, as long as they keep me on the list, i hope EVERYBODY gets signed, except for Naked Aggression. Not only that, but "Dookie," on the wicked major label, is measurably better than the new Mr. T Experience record on the kind and good independent label; what's up with that? (I know, know—it's the absence of Jon Von that cripple MTX. Fuck, he couldn't help it, he wanted to be in the Rip Offs because they're my favorite band. Who can blame him? He sold his shares in MT. T when they were at their peak, got in on the ground floor of something even BIGGER. If he was a stockbroker, we'd all be cleaning his toilets) And, since we're on the subject, do you wanna know what it is that proves, beyond the flimsiest see-thru poncho of a doubt, that the new Green Day record is, indeed, cool? I'll give ya a hint: it's not the feces-colored jewel box. It's not the bleeped-out cusswords on MTV. It's not the drugs & masturbation references on main stream radio (for the record, 'bout a year or so ago i was talking to the station manager of the local Crud Rock FM station, telling him i was gonna send him a tape of my band's technically wondrous opus entitled "Drugs & Mas-

turbation". *"'Drugs & Masturbation', come on, doesn't that sound like a hit? 'Drugs & Masturbation'"* He assured me that it sounded more like a near miss. NOW ya turn on the fucking radio and there's Green Day singing about—you guessed it—drugs & masturbation. There's ANOTHER thing i shoulda fucking annotated!). It's not the acne, not the stoopid nosering. It is, in fact, what's written on the little banner trailing from the end of the "BAD YEAR" blimp in the upper left-hand corner of the album cover, to wit: "EAT AT CHEF WONG'S." Think about that: where did you see that before? Stop thinking already, you won't remember: *that was on the t-shirt worn by the guy who was getting lobotomized in the John Holmstrom cartoon next to the lyrics to the song "Teenage Lobotomy" on the inner sleeve to "Rocket To Russia " by the Ramones.* D-uh! Green Day are officially cool for that reference alone!!! Oh yeah, the Ramones-- i kind of took them off the active list. They're still like my favorite bands of all time or something but i hadda retire their jerseys because toting around the fucking albatross-like burden of having the goddamn Ramones as my favorite band just got to be more trouble than it was worth. I mean yes, sure, fine, they're the greatest band of all time, whatever. But they're NEVER gonna be truly great again; it's just time to MOVE ON (if Nirvana broke punk in 1991, i'd say it's about goddamn time we started fixing it!). Youth of America! Heed my plea! DUMP THE FUCKERS! Find a new Acting Deputy Favorite Band that makes ya wet your pants merely imagining what their next record is gonna sound like! Stop molly coddling what's left of the Ramones! Let's melt down Joey into Soylent White! Find Johnny new life thru the Witness Protection Program! Ignore the other two guys because they're no REAL Ramones anyway! Better yet, let's just replace them with Head when no one's looking —'cause as of 4:29 PM CDT, Head are cooler than the Ramones anyway. The ONLY way the Ramones could convince me that they're back on the right track after "Acid Eaters" (How do you spell "Somebody To Love?" T-H-EE-N-D) would be to roll out a "Boogadaboogadaboogada" tribute album—which reminds me, i took a fellow columnist's name in vain last issue, apparently i'm not supposed to do that (yeah, like i should just know this stuff—like i actually read MRR or something!). I suppose this means that expressing my naked lust for that twelve-year-old bespectacled chick they got writing a column is right out. As of 4:32 PM CDT 4.8.94, the Rip Offs are still my favorite band, and Kurt Cobain is still dead. Rev out.

P.S. Shit, i completely forgot the COOLEST thing about major labels: They give you an automatic reason to hate a band you don't feel like liking. Take Rancid, for instance: i own all their records, and i enjoy all their records, but there's some real weird elusive quality about them that makes 'em seem real eminently, um, unlikable. For a while, i thought it would be all right to dislike them because they were on Epitaph— but then that Blitz cover from out of left field cancelled that out. But God DAMMIT, they're STILL suspect as a GoodWill porkchop—so i WANT 'em to get signed so i can have a valid excuse for not liking them. I could try not to like them because of the way they used the word 'punx" on the "Radio" sleeve (i think i'm a "punk rocker" by trade—which i believe means I owned a Blondie record at one point in time—and i would clamor against those who would call themselves "punks" and "punx" if only their sects weren't both a lot tougher than my sect, who are all a bunch of poseurs anyway), but that would be too technical to be understood by most of the punx. But doggone it all, imagine what it would be like if John Cleese dropped by your house and found your Rancid album and started reading the lyric sheet and got to the line that read "I'm gonna amplify the rage of a class that's made to feel inferior"—he'd probably cock an eyebrow, look up at you and deadpan "Bit of a moron, are we?" Who needs a tumble down the social register of THAT magnitude?? No, the sooner Rancid get signed, the better i'll sleep at night. Christ, they have former members of Operation Ivy in the band—how cool could they be??? WHOOPS, BARNEY TIME!!!

1993. The digital age. If you want spirit, you'd better get rich, because you're going to have to pay for it. CD's have replaced records by 95%. You've finally paid off your $2,000 state-of-the-art stereo only to discover it's now outdated and on sale at K-Mart for $299. Well, at least you have your CD's, a costly yet priceless collection of musical recordings which produce perfect music and never wear out. Certainly, it is safe to say that these digitally mastered recordings are timeless and cannot be improved upon, right???

CD's and digital recording instruments of any kind kill music. As long as we listen to digital music of any kind, we no longer have music. What we do have is an incredible simulation, but, I repeat, it's not music--sort of like a fake diamond, only much more disastrous.

Long ago there was a time when the only way to experience music was to play an instrument or to be in the immediate presence of a musical performance. In those days, if you were cold, you'd start afire, if you were hungry, you cooked some food, and, if your nose was too big, it stayed that way!

As recording techniques and players were invented and improved upon, people slowly got used to the idea of substituting a recorded performance for a live one. Surely, there were many skeptics at first, but, eventually, most agreed on the value of sound recording.

The stereo or turntable became the musical instrument, "a contrivance or apparatus for producing musical sounds." The sound record-

ing became the musician.

Musical vibrations were recorded onto master tapes in the form of tiny metal particles. From this our records and tapes were made.

A record player, utilizing a diamond needle, receives impressions from the grooves in a record. This causes the needle to vibrate, much like a guitar string or violin string does. This vibration produces direct electrical impulses which eventually come out of your speakers as music.

The tape player, utilizing a magnetic head, reads the alignment of metal particles on the tape. This magnetic pull is what then creates electrical currents, which eventually become sound.

With these two forms of playback there is no separation from the initial musical vibrations. The original vibrations have maintained a continuous wave. Each impulse is the direct result of its predecessor. Although we're getting music which is second, third, even tenth generation, we're still getting music.

The nature of music is vibration. These vibrations create sound waves that then effect us emotionally, spiritually, intellectually and physically. Each of these sound waves produces a myriad of overtones which also effect us on very subtle levels. Whether you're listening to Punk Rock or Mozart, these sound waves and overtones give the music its life. For music to remain musical through the recording process, these sound waves must be continuous, flowing and organic. Analog recording and playback machines (records, tapes) retain these musical qualities. Digital does not.

As I said before, your stereo is a musical instrument. With digital recording and playback machines (CD players, DAT machines), this instrument is now a computer. But, that's not all. The musician is also now a computer. The CD or digital tape does not play the computer as a record or tape plays the instrument of your stereo. Rather, this computer reads a series of instructions from the CD and then re-performs the music. What you hear is not the original performance, but, instead, a computer simulation.

The problem is, computers can't be made to convey an emotional, spiritual, or physical experience . It is simply not their nature. What we get is purely an intellectual process. Once the music enters this digital recording instrument/computer, we lose all emotional, spiritual, and physical connection to the original performance.

In order for a computer to reproduce musical sound wave, it first must categorize the wave in the form of a grid. This computer grid recreates the sound wave as a staircase. No matter how intricate this grid, no matter how detailed the computer program, it will never be able to accurately reproduce this musical sound wave. The stairs might get smaller, but they are still stairs, not a wave.

This simple fact explains the often heard complaint that CD's are edgy and abrasive. That they don't breathe or flow. That they aren't warm.

What this grid leaves us with is a computer-produced simulation of a sound wave, a computer produced simulation of a musical performance. All the warmth is gone, because we've lost the connection to the original source. The music and overtones have all been adjusted into their most dominant factors. The end result is a complicated display of computer technology which has little to do with the original music.

To further illustrate this point, look at your television screen. If you look closely enough, you will see that the screen is made up of thousands of tiny points of light called pixels. Each light changes color to make up a seemingly complete picture. Each light can only be one color or shade at a time. The resultant picture is not one connected whole, but, instead, made up of thousands of these tiny lights.

This is how digital recreates music. It read the music as thousands, even millions, of tiny lights or sound sources.

To the computer, the music never was and never will be a connected, whole body of sound. This is why computers can't make accurate musical sounds. It can't receive the initial musical vibrations, physically and completely, as a record or tape can. To the computer, the music is not physical experience but an idea, a creation of logic and the mind, and, consequently, it can only relate it as such.

Being fooled by these computer simulations has been easy. Especially when we're listening to music that we used to listen to in analog. It's easy for us to "fill in the blanks" and pretend that it's all there. But some things are missing. Other things are changed.

It's like the difference between a vase made by hand and fired in a kiln, versus one glued together by a computer with millions of tiny clay and glass particles. It might look like the same thing, but it's not. It didn't go thru the same alchemical process of being molded and glue by the artist, sealed and fused by the fire, cooled correctly, etc.

Computerized/digital music, like the vase, is riddled with holes. It is of a completely different nature and creative source and because of this can never satisfy us emotionally, physically or spiritually. Instead of soothing warm bath we have a tub full of millions of tiny ice cubes.

Now, surely, some will say, "But I do have emotional responses to CD music." Yes, you do. The difference is that you, an emotional being, are responding to the computer's performance of the music, rather than the musician's performance of the music. The only connection you have to the original performance is through your intellect. That's the only way the computer experiences, and that's the only way the compute relates.

Don't take anyone's word for it. Do a comparison and experience the difference for yourself. Take a record or analog tape of your favorite recording and compare it to a CD version. Make sure the tape or record is not from digital master (this is usually stated on the packaging). When listening, feel the difference.

With digital, can you hear and feel the computer singing and playing the various instruments? Can you feel the millions of tiny "sound cubes" forming "'sound staircases?"

With analog, can you feel the breath and life present in the room? Can you feel the sound waves splashing air currents over and through your body and around the room?

How do you feel after extended listening of each?

For this experiment, I suggest listening to the music in a contained, and, if possible, uncarpeted room. This will allow the overtones to freely bounce around the room, giving your entire body the full experience of the music.

Forget about scratches in a record. In fact, it's recommended that you take your oldest scratchiest record and see if it doesn't have more life than a CD version.

Many people feel that these computerized/digital sounds are actually antagonistic to us physically and emotionally, that the abrasive qualities of these "sound staircases" actually wear us down instead of replenishing us.

This makes sense when you consider that all day long we hear sounds in analog. Every thing from car horns to birds chirping comes to our ears in analog sound waves. When suddenly our bodies are bombarded with digital sounds through a CD, our minds may be fooled, but our bodies hear these sounds as the unnatural forms that they truly are.

Perhaps we've let computers intrude into our lives a bit too far. Maybe we can stop this before we have push-button guitars or digitally mastered paintings. Maybe it's more than just coincidence that the A.I.D.S. epidemic entered our culture at roughly the same time as CD's and it seems to be growing at about the same rate.

We can't accuse CD's of causing A.I.D.S. But maybe the lack of real music in our lives, music that feeds and replenishes not only the mind, but the spirit, body, and soul, has made it harder for us to heal ourselves, to fund cures for our diseases, to regenerate and change our physical forms.

Maybe this lack of real music has also made us more violent and frustrated, causing much of the recent increase in gun ownership killings, etc.

In this digital age, escaping these computer sounds is not as easy as one might think. For example, most films today record all dialog and sound effects digitally. Some films boast of having digital scores. 99% of radio airplay is not from the CD format. Many television shows use digital sound effects and dialog recording exclusively. This dehumanization of modern art and man has got to have an effect, the results of which only time will tell.

One writer suggests that if computers are reproducing music, even composing it, why not the next logical step of having computers be the ones to also listen to it.

This is not to say that computers and modern technology are bad or wrong (their advantages are numerous and need not be stated here). It is to say that there are some things computers can't, and shouldn't, do.

Our bodies are warmed by fire, cooled by air, nourished by water and food. If we substitute air for food or water for fire, we cause imbalances in our bodies and our lives. I'm afraid CD's are a big mistake—fake diamonds that cost us more than the real thing.

In this age of the artificial heart, science has taken away one of our most sacred arts. Here are some suggestions as to how you can take it back:

I . Stop buying CD's.

2. Stop buying records and tapes that come from digital masters.

3. Buy only records and tapes that come from analog master tapes.

4. Let your local record stores know how you feel.

5. Write letters to record companies.

6. For musicians: Eliminate digital recording, digital effects, digital keyboards, and digital instruments of any kind.

7. If you are a popular recording artist and must put out CD's, you can insure the preservation of your music by recording only in analog. Then, when CD's are gone, you won't be left with digital masters—complete misrepresentations of your original music.

Also, insist that analog cassette tapes are made available to the public and make sure these tapes don't come from digital masters.

Finally, if you're really bold, put a disclaimer on your CD's explaining that what the listener hears is not a complete or accurate representation of the original music.

8. If you're a filmmaker, avoid digital sound effects, scores, and dialog recordings to allow the feeling and emotion of these sounds back into your films.

9. Start playing a musical instrument.

Making music is an alchemical process. A sing of emotion spirit, and thought, which then pours out of our physical bodies through singing and playing musical instruments. Once this process is intellectualized through a computer, the music has died. The music, like the Self, cannot live without a physical body or vehicle. Without the physical properties of analog tapes or records, etched by musical vibrations, and read with diamonds and magnets, the music is no longer alive. The original music is no longer a fact, but an idea, programmed into a computer.

This major label topic is ho-hum, having been discussed to death in the last decade and the one before. I have only fleeting bits of knowledge relating to the topic picked up in years of laying music.

I remembered how I had gotten into blues the summer after ninth grade and for the most part this meant I was buying albums on small labels that I had never noticed before: Yazoo, Arhoolie, Delmark and so forth. I recalled learning the history of record companies. When the phonograph was first invented, it was sold in furniture stores, and the small stock of records that were available became accessories sold alongside couches and hassocks.

Since the blues was primarily a

black music, the first blues '78s were sold in furniture stores in black neighborhoods. It is amusing to me that the furniture clerks in these places would no doubt pick up some knowledge about these items they were selling, some of them perhaps becoming blues experts.

Now we have an industry that no longer sells records, it sells new music formats. Allowing them to endlessly reprint the same recordings that used to be sold in furniture stores. Major labels may just as well be selling coffee tables as CDs.

"One thing you have to realize about Manson is that they learned everything about 'Helter Skelter' from a scratched up old vinyl album," one of the biggest guys in the music business told me. (The former 600-pound doorman of a club in Huntsville, Alabama.) "Imagine what them boys mightta done if they had a nice clean-sounding CD of the Beatles 'white album' back then." Notice the sexual stereotyping typical of the music industry: 'them boys' in reference to a cult that centered around girls! In the same era that Manson and his kin began creepy crawling around the Hollywood hills, technology for recording was going through rapid new innovations at the same time the pop music of the day was changing into something 'old guard' A&R men such as Mitch Miller of Columbia could neither understand nor comprehend, though they liked the greenbacks that flowed in.

So for a few years you had unprecedented freedom in the major label scene. An album such as the Jefferson Airplane's 'Surrealistic Pillow' was created by people using an 8-track machine for the first time in their lives, the big label honchos shrugging "Gee, we don't know how to use these things" and happy to let the weird longhairs fuck around as long as they came up with a tape on a reel and didn't murder any famous movie actresses in the process.

From here we have evolved to a point where the major labels have established "standards" for everything they release, these rigid controls loved by the recording industry, guaranteeing big profits for those who build high tech studios and mold corporate 'record producer' types at $50,0000 per 'grunge rock' release. It works the same way as the construction industry, rumored to be the main force behind 'three strikes/you're out' because of the lush profits available when dealing with government prison-building contracts.

The number three is of paramount importance as you can see. We have not only chosen three as a breaking point for incarcerating career criminals, but career hit-makers know full well anything longer than three minutes will probably not get played on the radio, the exceptions happening of course during the Manson era, the most notorious being 'MacArthur Park' not coincidentally about Los Angeles and baking cakes, the latter a standard way of breaking someone out of prison. This song, written by Jim Webb and recorded by actor Richard Harris, was known as the 'poo poo' song by disc jockeys, for reasons that will be explained in the future "How to shit on the job" issue.

The only thing of importance in the "counter-culture" to these businesses is of course the counter the merchandise is sold over and the other one you use to tally up the day's sales. And, of course, every vital, free-thinking, convention shattering cultural movement that only the real hipsters know about eventually turns into a car commercial.

Doing zine reviews for this magazine has always been a fun and rewarding experience. I've seen so many great things that I never in a million years would've seen any other way. I feel so privileged telling you this, because working here gives me an unprecedented opportunity to check out so much stuff with so little effort I would advise anybody remotely interested in zines to check out the review section. I feel that it's probably the most important section of this magazine. Case closed.

But what I really want to talk about is my own boring views on the whole major label thing. Because there's nothing I hate worse than listening to someone else's self-righteous diatribe about corporate greed when they have no clue about what they're actually talking about. So listen to mine. I won't go into detail, but think I'll make a few things clear.

Supporting major label music in your fanzine is fundamentally bad and wrong. Bad, bad zine! MRR scolds you - not punk, not punk! Ha ha, not to be too judgmental (what?), but I think it's not only wrong, but self-destructive. To me, doing a fanzine comes out of a direct need to communicate. Perhaps you feel so strongly about such and such political view, or music, or idea, and you see no existing avenue for it. So you make your own. Hurray! That's what I call inspiration. Of course, there are a multitude of zines that seemingly lack any sort of inspiration, but perhaps there are other reasons for their existence. What irks me is seeing someone devote precious zine space to some stupid alter no-rock band who already has a shitload of press everywhere else. Does this zine actually expose us to something new or are they rehashing the same old shit from the same lame glossy mags that we tried to bypass in the first place. And if I actually did want to read about the Afghan whatevers or the Rocket from the who cares, do they actually think I want to read their shitty-ass tiny print, handwritten, boring account when I could purchase *Spin* and read the same info in full color? Because when it come down to it, we can't compete on that level, and maybe it wasn't meant to be in the first place. So what harm are you doing when you review that stupid "grunge" rock band or, sorry, corporate "punk" CD?

By giving major labels free (!!!) publicity no matter how small, you are giving them your credibility, your stamp of approval. If you say "hey, that's punk", then you've al-

ready opened the door. I hate to say it, but people don't think for themselves. By seeing someone who supposedly has morals and a conscience (after all you're so punk) give a green light to something, you become just one more bastion ruled by corporate terrain. Do you think the public actually likes punk? Hell no! What they like is being able to buy rebellion. They lead their shitty boring lives, but when they get free time, they buy their "punk" to prove how outrageous they are, thereby winning crucial points with their peers without actually having to do anything. Sure, this sounds simplistic, and it's not a simple thing, but it's true. Rebellion sells.

"Omigod, will you look at that? It's a punk rocker with a Bad Religion t-shirt. He's so weird. He's so cool. I saw Bad Religion on MTV today, so he must be cool. And I can be too if I just buy their CD." It happens. Not necessarily so blatantly, but the reasoning is there. What better publicity can one ask for than to have their product displayed on a walking, talking bill board? Marketing the "unmarketable" has become an extremely effective (and predictable) ploy as of late. You know that others are aware of this when you see corporations cashing in on it. The major label, Def American, recently changed its name and logo to keep up with these ever-changing times. Their new name is "American", and their logo is a goddamn upside-down American flag! What?!! How shocking, how outrageous, I am so hip to them. Do you need more proof? You don't need to look very far, and I'm not going to explain any further.

Punk is really important to me. It's one of the few mediums where people can express opinions that can't be expressed elsewhere. It's the only place where I can run a queer punk record label. It's the only place where I can publish my own crummy zine and actually be able to have others take it seriously. I can put out records and CDs without publicists, lawyers, contracts, videos, or a lot of money. Because when it comes down to it, I can't compete. We have to keep the underground a safe place to exist. Radical ideas don't exist within the society that caused them in the first place . Please don't give them the last territory that we can still call our own.

The major label thing: This was supposed to be a theme issue on "the subject of major labels an their effects." I think most folks have seen their effect on Kurt Cobain. No doubt that, beside drugs and Courtney, the reason he blew his head off was the conflict between ideals and the shit he had to put up with. MTV, no fan contact, partying with the stars, the cover of Rolling Stone—who wouldn't kill themselves?

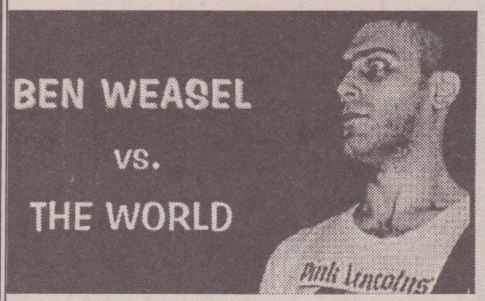
Actually, major labels do us a favor. They keep the indy scene fresh. After a band lies around for a year or so, they get old. There are hundreds of new bands starting out. If no one clears out the old ones, there is no room for the new guys. The majors scrape the scum from the top of the indy heap and leave room for the new folks on the bottom.

Actually, some good bands have been/are on major labels. (THE RAMONES!) If a band wants to live off its music, eventually it almost has to go to a major label. Most indies don't have the finances or the competence to keep a band in concerts and t-shirts. I don't blame a band for going major. I (usually) just stop listening to them.

A recent development has been major label distribution of indies. Matador, Mammoth and some other true indies now have major label distribution. This is a good compromise, provided the labels are strong enough.

With this method, the indies can maintain their independence and yet find their way into more outlets than they could elsewhere. They are also freed from the mundane and costly chores of sending out promos and collecting bills. If a label doesn't like the major's policies, it can simply withdraw—without the contractual messiness that happens between bands and majors labels.

The danger, of course, is that the indy will become addicted to the major label distribution. It might change itself to please the distributor. But this is the fault of an indie with integrity deficiency—and not the fault of the major.



I've spent so much goddamn time spouting off about major labels, you'd think I don't have anything more to say. Of course I do.

First of all, I'd like to extend a kick in the pants to anyone who is actually stupid enough to believe that major labels moving in and buying up punk rock is a big deal. That is not a big deal, not at all. Major labels exist to make money. It wouldn't matter if they were selling dildos or kewpie dolls - their bottom line is profit. I guess we could wring our hands and wrinkle up our foreheads in concern over the fact that these leeches exist, but I personally don't have the time for such fantastic horseshit. It's just part of the real world.

The problem isn't major labels coming into the punk scene to buy up your favorite bands. How can they buy something that's not for sale? And if it is for sale, what do you care? See, there are three classes of bands. There are the bands who wouldn't dream of selling out and can afford that luxury of ethics because they have such a tiny cult audience that nobody's asking 'em to sell out. Then there are bands (and I'll tell ya, my town is crammed full of 'em) who use the D.I.Y. ethics first as an excuse for creating an arrogant, elitist club and then as a stepping stone toward becoming the next BAD RELIGION. Then

there are bands who fall somewhere in the middle. These are the bands who really believe in and own their ethics but are not stupid or naive enough to believe that playing five dollar gigs in V.F.W. halls is going to be satisfying for them in another five years. There are other classes of bands, of course, like all the shitty bar rock and pop bands that were sending their demo tapes to major labels years ago and are now calling themselves 'alternative' and getting signed by the truck load. I won't concern myself with them because they are the mainstream segment of our population. They are the Van Halen's of the 90's, eternally clueless, forever stuck in a high school locker room gauging the length of everyone else's prick to make sure they don't fall short.

I'm sure many of the other writers in MRR have wonderful opinions and ideas about what we should do about this. But really, why should anybody do anything about it? Bands who are gonna sell out are gonna do it regardless of what anyone says. The only thing that bugs me about that is that they never have the balls to admit that they sold out. They're always justifying it in silly, pathetic ways, as if they actually need to retain credibility with the punks.

I used to get pissed about bands who used the structure I supported and believed in to get what they wanted, only to drop the punk scene. I don't care as much any more because that's the norm now. Lookout Records never used to make bands sign contracts. Now they have to because so many of their bands show the telltale signs of jumping ship. Lookout needs to protect itself. Yeah, it's sick, but that's what's happened.

It doesn't matter to me because I'm so rarely inspired by punk music these days anyway. It's interesting to note however, that in my humble opinion, the best punk rock today is coming out of Spain, Germany and Italy. Some of the greatest bands I've heard in the past year will never play in this country and will never have their records sold here. Certainly part of the reason for this is because they don't have the opportunities that we Americans do to sell out. I definitely don't think those circumstances are an honorable, noble thing. I think it sucks. Bands like Spain's SHOCK TREATMENT and DEPRESSING CLAIM are much better than most of the bands on say, Epitaph or Lookout, and they won't sell one tenth of the records that their American counterparts do. That sucks. But on the other hand, even though many of these bands are heavily influenced by popular American bands, their lack of a solid, easy ten step program success means that they have the freedom to do exactly what they want. It's doubtful that any but a few of the great, unknown European punk bands see themselves as having the slightest chance to become famous - therefore, what they do is more pure in intent and more honest in execution. It's impossible for them to pander to an audience because they basically don't have one, at least not in the way we think of it.

I would never suggest that this makes them better people, or more ethical than their American counterparts. Surely if they had access to the same easy program of success that we do they'd fall prey to the same shit we do. But the parallel is in the American bands of the late eighties who were in a similar situation.

We had some heavy hitters around back then, even though their glory days were long over. CIRCLE JERKS, 7 SECONDS, M.D.C. and probably about ten others were still capable of drawing huge crowds wherever they went. But great punk bands who were just starting out got virtually no support. Of course, many of these bands went on to be legendary, but how many people remember that when OPERATION IVY came to Chicago they played in front of about 100 people? Most of the punks were off at the AGNOSTIC FRONT show. The same could be said for CRIMPSHRINE, JAWBREAKER, CRINGER and countless others who are revered today. Now, a great young band like PROPAGANDHI can go out on tour and you can bet your ass they'll be drawing huge crowds. That's not a bad thing by any means - it just shows that the punks have finally caught on. There's no doubt in my mind that a bill featuring NOFX and PROPAGANDHI would draw hundreds more people than an EXPLOITED gig, but it wasn't too long ago that NOFX couldn't draw flies and PROPAGANDHI didn't even exist.

Unfortunately, what has come along with this is the tendency of younger bands to see their music in a purely business sense. I don't mean just money - I'm talking about the underlying attitude that these bands have. Their goals are different and personally, they disgust me. As in the case with just about everyone on the planet, it seems that most young bands live in a black and white world; either you sell your record only through small indie distributors or you go for the brass ring sporting the BAD RELIGION logo. We've seen bands like HUSKER DU become ruined by going for the gold and we've seen other bands like 7 SECONDS turn to shit by being naive and ignorant about business. You would think that bands would've learned from all that and found some middle ground, but most haven't.

JAWBREAKER is one of the few band who have. These guys aren't dummies when it comes to business. They're also not crooks. More over, they have a sense of fun about what they do that goes beyond the usual definition of the word. While half the punk scene is calling them sell-out scumbags and the other half is wondering why the hell they haven't made the "smart" move and signed to a major, they're cruising along doing business as usual. Their ethics are their own. Don't tell me it's easy for a band like JAWBREAKER to do what they do. No, it's easy for some podunk, nobody band to take an ethical stand. JAWBREAKER has been approached by just about every major label around and they've turned them down. How many young bands do you know that would do the same?

But JAWBREAKER are not going to be suckered into a no win situation with a club that's going to stiff them or a kid promoter with twisted D.I.Y. ethics who thinks that anything above gas money is immoral. They do their business by their own rules and I respect and admire them for that. Yet while every other band in the country is attempting to rip off their sound, few, if any, are attempting to understand

the way JAWBREAKER does business, which is ultimately what gained them their popularity and is probably what keeps them going. The mere fact that they're one of only two bands I can name (the other being NOFX) who actually gets considerably better with each record should say something. It doesn't have anything to do with marketing or politics, it has to do with priorities.

Mykel mentioned in his April column that SCREECHING WEASEL had singed with Warner Bros. A lot of people asked me if this was true, which was not only an insult in itself, but also a sign of people's general stupidity; if you don't take everything Mykel says in his APRIL column with a grain of salt, you're not too bright.

What pissed me off wasn't so much people asking me if it was true (when what they should have been saying is, "What kind of bullshit is Mykel talking about?") although that bugged me slightly. I also wasn't all that annoyed by the people who gloated over it, as if their silly predictions had finally come true, although that was slightly annoying as well. What really irritated the shit out of me were the people who believed it and thought it was an intelligent and logical move.

Look, I don't really give a fuck for the punk scene today. I don't know what you call it when you've gone miles past jaded and disillusioned, but that's where I am. I have only a few reasons for retaining the slight interest I do in punk rock. But signing to a major? Come on! I won't talk ethics here, because if somebody threw enough money at me I'd leave my ethics behind in a New York minute. Let's just talk business. If you're going to sign to a major, you first have to have interest from the majors. We have very little. Without that interest, you can't get yourself the deal you want. Secondly, you have to be willing to accept the fact that the people you're dealing with don't give a fuck if you end up on welfare or shoot shit into your arm or blow your fucking head off with a shotgun. In fact, those people will exploit any problems you may have, romanticize them and leave your silly ass twisting in the wind. Third, no matter how good you think you are, you'll probably flop and, unlike most punk indies, major labels don't care if you're a really good band or not. If you're not making money, fuck you and pal, once you've taken that road you can't go back. Your career as a musician is over. Fourth, even if you become huge, the fuckers steal from you. You'll be making so much money it won't matter, but you *will* be getting robbed (this last one is unfortunately true of many indies as well...). Fifth, in order to protect yourself as much as possible, you have to give a cut of your dough to a lot of people who aren't doing nearly enough to earn it (and don't forget that there are many more salaries to pay and *everybody* wants, and gets, a piece of your action). Last, you *have* to do things. You can get a contract saying you don't have to do videos or you only have to tour one month a year, but if you stick with that shit you'll flop. If you sell 60,000 albums on Lookout, you'll be set for at least a few years, assuming your needs and tastes are like those of the average Joe. If you sell 60,000 albums on Atlantic, it's unlikely that you'll see a dime and if you're lucky, they might give you one more chance to make some real money before they drop you like a bad habit.

So from a purely financial standpoint, I don't think I'm capable of doing such stuff. I mean, I feel like I'm in on the world's greatest scams or something. I get paid what I think is an obscene amount of money and all I have to do is what I'd be doing anyway - writing and recording songs and going out to play them in front of people once in a while. Even when my band breaks up, I'll most likely continue to make money because nothing jacks up record sales like a band breaking up (or one of the members O.D.ing or eating a shotgun shell).

Financially, I'm the first to admit that I'm pretty cynical. I don't try to justify the money I make by saying that I'm giving something important to people or making the world a better place. There are many better bands with far more intelligent people running them that will never make the kind of money I'm making (and let's clear something up here before the more reactionary of you start flipping out - I make about 15,000 a year. In the real world, that ain't shit for a 26 year old man. Unless of course you're like me and have no other skills besides pumping gas and hauling boxes onto trucks, in which case, as far as I'm concerned I'm one wealthy sonofabitch). I got lucky. I don't press my luck. I'm no gambler and a deal with a major is nothing more than a high stakes crap shoot.

GREEN DAY is showing all the signs of becoming the next NIRVANA, or damn close. I'm happy for them. I wouldn't have done it their way, but it seems to be working out for them. But what about all the other bands who have signed recently? Does anybody really believe that SAMIAM is actually going to break through to a mainstream audience? How about JAWBOX? And what about all the bands who are secretly hoping that the day will come when they get to take that crap shoot? If I was a nice guy, I'd feel sorry for them. But I'm not a nice guy and I won't cry any tears when they lose everything that was ever important to them.

The punk scene has grown up. We shouldn't be acting so goddamn stupid now. We know better. I'm not going to condemn anyone who signs to a major. Their business is their own. But if you're going to sell out, at least do it smart. Admit you've sold out. Don't be naive enough to believe that major labels have changed to fit the punks. Get a good lawyer and never forget that you have no friends at the label, that they'll kick you out on your ass if you don't turn a profit. Don't forget that the ones who are signing your paychecks are also stealing a hefty chunk of your profit. Don't forget that your lifespan as a band will be considerably shortened and you'll likely turn to some form of dope or end up with an ulcer from all the pressure to do more and be more. And most importantly, don't forget that your success or failure has nothing to do with how good you are or how smart you are. It has to do with factors that nobody can explain, just like shooting craps. If you go into it ready to lose everything you have, you might come out of it relatively undamaged. Me, I think I'll leave the dice tossing to those with more nerve.

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*BEFORE THE OFFSPRING SOLD OVER 3 MILLION COPIES OF THEIR LATEST LP---WHILE REMAINING ON AN INDIE LABEL

*BEFORE GREEN DAY SOLD JUST A BIT LESS WHILE JUMPING TO A MAJOR

*BEFORE COLUMNIST AND LOOKOUT RECORDS OWNER LARRY LIVERMORE BECAME RICH OFF THE SALES OF GREEN DAY'S PRIOR RECORDS

*BEFORE JAWBREAKER SCREWED UP COLUMNIST BEN WEASEL'S COMMENTARY BY COMMITTING TO SIGNING TO A MAJOR

*BEFORE RANCID SCREWED UP COLUMNIST REV. NORB'S HOPES BY BACKING OUT AT THE LAST MINUTE FROM SIGNING TO A MAJOR

LIFE IS FUNNY.

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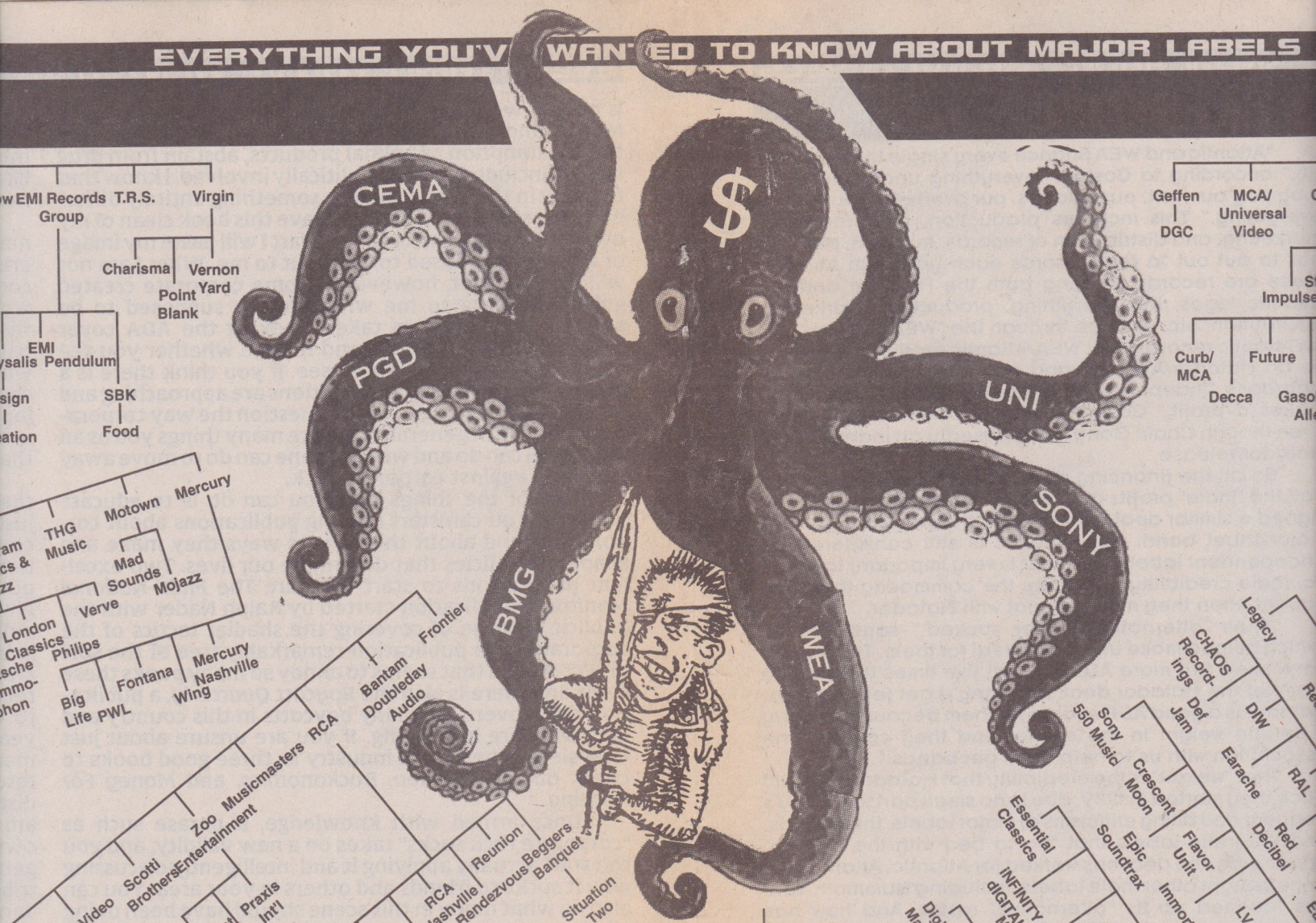

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